Albert, King of the Belgians

The Life of His Majesty Albert, King of the Belgians

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By

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"Belgium, Her Kings, Kingdom and People," etc.

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To Her Royal Highness
Princess Marie José of Belgium

Madam,—A resident in Brussels, it has been my privilege to watch the growth of your Royal Highness, and, in common with all who live beneath the rule of His Majesty the King, your Royal Highness's father, to rejoice in the brightness of your gracious life.

Guided by the wise and kindly hands of your Royal parents, you have gladdened the lives of millions in Belgium. All of those millions, and other millions of true-hearted folk outside the country who love Belgium and her Royal family, wish at this moment to offer to your Royal Highness signs of their gratitude.

Some would carry flowers to you; those who are in Belgium earnestly work for the charity to little children placed under your Royal Highness's patronage; all wish to do something for Belgium.

It has been thought I could best serve by telling something of the life of the great and gallant King, His Majesty, your Royal Highness's father. Since it treats of so noble a subject, one most dear to you, I venture to carry it to you, and offer it, a little gift from, Madam,

Your Royal Highness's
Most humble and most obedient servant,
John de Courcy Mac Donnell

INTRODUCTION

BY

COMMANDANT MATON,

Military Attaché of the Belgian Legation, London

The infancy of King Albert was characterised by the simplicity of the family life in which it was passed. On the death of his elder brother, Baudouin, which happened in 1891, he became heir to the throne of Belgium.

After general and military studies he engaged in practical work and travel, undertaking, notably, a voyage to North America; and his knowledge is remarkably developed, above all in the domains of social science and economics.

King Albert was not well known before his accession to the throne. He lived in the shadow of an eminent but authoritative monarch, kept apart from the great enterprises which marked the end of the preceding reign.

The old King, after a fecund reign, after the realisation of a grandiose programme, died somewhat isolated in the middle of a sad family dispute, misunderstood by all those his genius surpassed, feared by all, but loved by some, intimate with him, who knew him.

It is not very easy to succeed to a great man.

King Albert surmounted that difficulty with great ease.

His first advantage consisted in his presenting a moral physiognomy totally different from that of his predecessor. He did not come alone to the throne. He arrived with "his wife and children"—in that there was a first reaction, one most sympathetic in Belgium, which of itself gained him an instinctive popularity.

He commenced his profession of king, if one may use the expression, modestly, but he soon manifested a very active personality, energetic and most intelligent. Those remarkable qualities are actuated by a powerful lever; the sentiment of duty, the need of truth and justice carried to a rare degree.

He applied himself so conscientiously to the fulfilment of his mission, neglecting no interest, no branch of national life, that soon everyone felt the beneficent action of the head of the State extend to his particular domain.

His upright spirit searches everywhere for personal merit, industry, and moral qualities.

An example which speaks much for this characteristic is borrowed from his family life. The principal condition which he insisted on being observed in the selection of the comrades of his sons was that they should be children "of honest men, and workers, not children of idlers." He made a serious examination of the Congo in the spring of 1909, traversing

the colony from end to end—it was a happy inspiration. Some months later King Leopold II., whom he succeeded, died.

The economic machine having been marvellously fitted in the course of the preceding reign, he was able to devote himself to putting in motion the numerous moral, intellectual, and artistic resources of the nation. In that he was exceptionally seconded by the eminent woman who is Queen of the Belgians. He understood, moreover, that a rich people occupying the perilous geographical position of Belgium required a strong army, a school of energy and disinterestedness.

King Leopold II. had had the satisfaction of signing, on his death bed, a military law which sensibly ameliorated the national defence. In spite of the hesitations, and even of the systematic opposition which so many years of illusions had accumulated, King Albert resumed the work begun by his predecessor, and succeeded, thanks to the clairvoyant foresight of a Minister of great value, in creating a real national army. Unfortunately, the organisation of this army was not completed in 1914.

At the moment of the terrible crisis which descended on Belgium he was found calm and heroic, endowed with exceptional physical vigour. He is always at his post braving the most real dangers, and, once more he finds himself there with "his wife."

King Albert is a man of action. He is also a

man who studies, and, finally, a man who knows how to talk.

His conversation is never useless. It is always interesting; often witty. His style is precise and his vocabulary very extensive.

That popularity, which was surely justified, of the first years of his reign, is affirming itself with éclat. The Chief of the State and his people find themselves indissolubly united in the same sentiment and the same will.

My most deep thanks are due, and I gratefully render them, to His Excellency, Count de Jehay, Belgian Ex-Minister to Luxembourg, for his great kindness in submitting this work to King Albert for His Majesty's gracious revision, and for the trouble he took speedily to convey to me the King's approval of the work.

My thanks are also due to Commandant Maton, Military Attaché of the Belgian Legation to the Court of St. James, who in several conversations and in the notes I have been able to embody in the work, has given information the value of which must be apparent to all.

JOHN DE COURCY MAC DONNELL

March, 1915

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CHAPTER I

The King's Birth and Accession

On the evening of Thursday, April 8th, 1875, a salvo of a hundred and one guns, fired on the plain of manœuvres at Brussels, announced to the citizens the birth of the Prince. On the next day the newspapers bore official announcement:

> "Her Royal Highness, Madame the Countess of Flanders, was delivered yesterday, Thursday, at half-past five o'clock in the evening, of a Prince, who has received the names of Albert, Leopold, Marie, Meinrad."

Thirty-four years later, on another Thursday, December 23rd, 1909, this Prince as King Albert I. ascended the throne of Belgium. In the Palace of the Nations at Brussels, speaking successively in

French and Flemish, he took the oath of the Belgian kings to preserve the constitution and maintain the independence and the rights of the country, before the assembled Parliament. How well King Albert has kept that oath the world knows.

The Royal family stayed over-night at the Château of Laeken. In the morning, at eight o'clock, the Queen's cortège started from the royal suburb to the sound of the National Anthem, amidst the acclamations of the crowd gathered from all parts of the kingdom, and passed to the city.

In her carriage beside the Queen sat the King's mother, the Countess of Flanders, whose face glowed with joy. Opposite sat the young Princes, Leopold, the present Duke of Brabant, heir to the throne, and his brother Charles, for whom his father's title of Count of Flanders has been revived.

The boy Princes rejoiced as hugely in the crowd as the crowd rejoiced in them.

In the next carriage there followed the King's two sisters, Princess Clementine, wife of Prince Victor Napoleon, and Princess Stéphanie.

In the other carriages there followed the members of the Royal house, and around them on horses that pranced and caracoled was an escort of the Guards.

As King Albert rode out of the gates of the Château, the trumpets rent the air, and the National Anthem, the Brabançonne, was played, but above the blare of the trumpets, above the music, the people's cries

resounded, " Vive le Roi, vive Albert ! " There was already a strong note of affection, as strong as the note of loyalty in the cry, " Vive Albert ! " The King was already acclaimed the people's King—Vive Albert!

On the King's right there rode, supporting Belgium most fittingly, as is now proved, the Duke of Connaught. On the King's left there rode his wife's brother, Prince Francis Joseph. Behind His Majesty there was a train of royalties, the professed friends of the King—Leopold Salvator of Austria, Wilhelm of Hohenzollern, and others, whose friendship for Belgium was vaguer than the vaguest dreams. Beside them there were men of equally royal rank, and other men representing crowns as great and thrones as honoured as those found in any part of Austria or Germany, who in themselves and in their masters are true to their oaths.

The Netherlands was there represented by the Prince Consort, an Infant of the Royal House represented Spain. To-day, with kingdoms rent asunder, we remember those who stood by Belgium and who stand by her and her King at this moment. The Netherlands has maintained her rights, Spain and America are saving the population of Belgium.

To me, author of this book, it is a cause of pride to know that the representative of His Most Christian King of Spain and the representative of the United States of America are both of Irish descent and sympathy.

His Excellency, the Marquis de Villalabor, adds most proudly to his name Villalabor, Y. O'Neill; Mr. Brand Whitlock, the present American Minister at Brussels, boasts also of his Irish connections.

I have not wandered far from the history of the King's installation in speaking of these representatives of foreign States, for the Ministers accredited to Brussels at the King's coronation from Spain and America were Mr. Page Bryan, of the old Irish house of O'Brien of Thomond, and Mr. Merry del Val, brother of the Cardinal, one of the Merrys of Waterford, whose name, as men of Irish descent and intense loyalty to the Crown, was known to all before ever it was thought Germany would tear up a "scrap of paper."

On the morning of the day on which the King was crowned it rained, but no one in the huge crowds gathered together remembered that it rained. None thought of anything but gaiety—all were gay. From a dozen different points of vantage I watched the procession pass. The little Princess Marie José was not present in the royal cortège; her parents had thought it better to leave her in the house of her grandmother, the Countess of Flanders, from which she could witness the procession. She did so. From the windows of my Club, Le Cercle Africain, opposite, I watched the Princess and the crowd, and rejoiced in both. For hours they cheered, and with reason, for never was there a Princess more charming in a

fairy tale—never was there a little girl more lovable and less unspoiled.

Again the trumpets sounded, again the crowd hurrahed, again all was frenzy. The King passed—a little girl cheered and cheered wildly, she waved her handkerchief in one hand, she waved it in the other, she waved it in both hands, she flung it aside and waved instead a huge slice of bread, from which she had just bitten a morsel—it was the Princess Marie José!

In the Palace of Parliament waiting politicians questioned each other eagerly as to the probable policy of the new King, and what his reign would offer. Belgium, which copied England in her customs, now joins with England in her actions. The Cabinet resigned on the King's accession, and the King might, had he so willed, have summoned a new Ministry. He did not do so, but accepted himself the responsibilities the Government had undertaken, and those still greater he knew the whole country willed, party differences being ignored. His oath proved that he was, as the crowd had acclaimed him, King of the Belgians. It is a simple oath. He took it both in Flemish and French, and in the moment of taking it he united the races that inhabit Belgium in loyalty to their country's flag. But not all were loyal to the Crown. There was still a handful of men ardent in their actions and in their hearts, who thought loyalty to Belgium was

best proved by disloyalty to the Crown. These men are Belgians; they remain loyal to the country, but disloyalty to the Crown is a thing no man dare murmur in their presence to-day. Their King has proved himself the country's defender.

Each King that has ruled over Belgium has worked well for the country. Leopold I. strove hard to consolidate his little kingdom; Leopold II. made the little kingdom he succeeded to, a wide empire—he fired Belgium's sons with the zeal by which Europe benefits to-day. Albert I. prepared his people for peace as well as for war. He girt his sword around him, but he also opened books and taught the Belgian world to read and to admire the works of Belgian poets and romancers, as they had long admired those of Belgian scientists and historians. The King's announcement of this in his speech at his accession to the throne impressed all Belgium.

In the English Parliament, when the King opens a session, silence does not make itself felt. The King's peers are there and the peeresses, and all know, or think they know, what will come from the King's lips. In Belgium, moulded though her institutions are on those of England, democratic though she may have thought she was, things are different. Men in that country still believe that the King's speech expresses the personal wishes of the King, and as regards King Albert's pronouncements they were right. He said:

"At the moment that I assume the mission, which the constitution confers on me, my thoughts are naturally carried to the founders of our independence, to the Congress which fixed in an immemorial charter the fundamental principles of our national life and towards those eminent men who illumined the epoch of 1830 and who guided Belgium in the ways of political wisdom. My thoughts here naturally turn towards the chief of the dynasty—King Leopold I., the chosen of the free electors of the nation.

"Here I address to them a grateful and thankful homage. Respectful guardian of the institutions which the country gave to itself, Leopold I. comprehended and realised the aspirations of the Belgian people. He consolidated Belgium at home—he made her honoured outside. In the great family of nations Belgium was esteemed as a country of order, of freedom, of progress—her King as a sage. The King whom, alas, we weep for to-day, undertook, the moment he ascended the throne, to make Belgium greater and more powerful, a noble ambition which he had the glory of realising.

"It is scarcely thirty years since there was seen on the map of Africa an immense and impenetrable territory desolated by slavery—it was a stain on the face of the globe. Now peace reigns in that country widely open to civilisation. Who realised this miracle? King Leopold II., by his

foresight, his courage, his tenacity, valiantly seconded by the devotion of so many of our compatriots. The memory of this will rest engraved in the hearts of our people.

"Animated by the constant thought of enriching the nation, King Leopold wished to make the economic foundations of the country most solid. His designs always vast, were seconded by his will, which never failed and which in many adverse or critical circumstances, was solemnly affirmed, and the country was proud of its King.

"The expressions of gratitude which saluted the memory of King Leopold II. testify to the most sincere gratitude of all the Belgians, and in this homage, foreign potentates, moved by the mourning of the Belgian nation, and the admirers of the intellectual qualities of Leopold II. have desired to associate themselves. In the name of Belgium I address myself to the Princes, to the ambassadors, to the envoys extraordinaires, whose presence has been for us a precious pledge of friendship.

"Gentlemen, more and more the moment has come for Belgium to recognise her destiny and to look the facts of the future in the face. In the course of an existence of three-quarters of a century she has realised—surpassing the most optimistic previsions of her founders—that she is happy and she is rich, but riches create responsibilities for countries, as for individuals. The intellectual

and moral forces alone of a nation are the foundations of its prosperity.

"It behoves us to prolong a brilliant era by imbuing ourselves with the ideas and principles which are the traditions of the Belgians—the steadfast attachment to all our constitutional liberties, the love of our independence, wisdom and reasonableness in public affairs—it is thus that the Belgian people will maintain intact their sacred patrimony created by the labour of so many generations. They will march on towards the pacific conquests of labour and service, while the artists and writers of Flanders and Wallonia will strew the way with their masterpieces.

"The nation of its free-will, desirous of completing the work of its King, has assumed the sovereignty of the Congo territories. In the consciousness of its duty, also with firmness, it has traced the colonial policy it intends to follow. It is a policy of humanity and of progress. To a justice-loving people a colonising mission can only be one of high civilisation. By accepting it loyally a small country shows itself great. Belgium governs herself by institutions the principles of which have been copied by other States. She has always held to her promises, and when she undertakes to apply to the Congo a programme worthy of herself, none have the right to doubt her word.

"Gentlemen, I have a very clear conception of

my duty. The duty of Princes is dictated to their conscience by the spirit of the people, for if the throne has its prerogatives, it has, above all, its responsibilities. It is necessary that the Sovereign should hold himself with entire loyalty, above all parties. It is necessary that he be watchful for the maintenance of the vital forces of the nation. It is necessary that he should be ceaselessly attentive to the voice of the country, and watch with solicitude over the welfare of the poor. The Sovereign should be the servant of the law and the upholder of social peace.

"May God help me to fulfil this mission. As for myself, I shall always be ready to second the efforts of those who work for the grandeur of the country and who, filled with the spirit of concord and social advancement, raise the intellectual and moral level of the nation, develop education and instruction, and assure to the masses greater well-being.

"I love my country; the Queen shares my sentiments of unalterable fidelity to Belgium; we imbue our children with them, and we awaken in them at the same time love of their native land, love of their family, love of labour, love of good. These are the virtues which render nations strong.

"Gentlemen, the reception which has been given to me has touched me profoundly. I see in it a proof of confidence which honours me as well

as sustains me. I will exert myself to merit it. In taking the constitutional oath I swear to myself and to the country to scrupulously fulfil my duties and consecrate all my forces and all my life to the service of the Fatherland."

Electricity was in the air while the King delivered his speech. The Belgian Chamber is a noble hall, well fitted for a historic gathering. All present recognised that they were witnessing an event which no Belgian in future times could forget, but none, except perhaps the King himself, who made the speech, knew to what a great extent the scene was to be historic. King Albert spoke from his heart the sentiments which were those of the whole nation. The dangers which the public thought threatened Belgium did not exist. Belgium's good-will had removed them. The words in which the King declared, "No one has the right to doubt the word of the nation," were received with salvoes of applause; the whole assembly, from Cardinal, princes, magistrates, ministers of state, grouped to the right of the throne, to the very humblest citizens in the galleries, joined in acclaiming these words, as they did in acclaiming the sentence in which the King spoke of the constitutional liberties of the country, and, again, that in which he spoke of the art and artists of Flanders and Wallonia.

King Albert is a nervous speaker; his whole person vibrates with the sentiment he expresses.

In this speech he accentuated every passage, and conveyed to all the conviction of security. The greatest moment came when, extending his hand with a solemn gesture, he took the oath in French and in Flemish. He is the first of the Belgian Kings who swore in the two languages to maintain the constitution, and the people of the two races who united to form the country were equally gratified.

Nothing could have passed more happily than this day. All possible animosities—religious, political, or social—were laid aside. If any Socialist raised his voice it was to cheer the King. If any anarchist was by he held his peace. Belgium, when Belgians rule the land, is a country as free to all comers as England is. It was the proud boast of Brussels that it was the centre of social effort. There gathered there, unfrowned on by the Government, undisturbed by the police, the most advanced Socialists. The preachers of Republicanism and the apostles of Free Thought were there as free as Jesuits and Legitimists, and Belgian anarchists were, before war changed all things, no insignificant body. In the King's entourage there was no little fear of what anarchists or Socialists might do. Taking advantage of Belgian liberty, admirers of Spanish anarchists had made more than one demonstration about that time, and it was feared these men might seize the opportunity of insulting the Prince who represented Spain, so much so that there was great dread of

that Prince's appearance in the royal procession. But neither the Spanish Prince nor the Belgian King gave heed to the whispered counsels of prudence. The Prince took the place that was his by right, and the anarchists let him pass in peace, and all went well.

What struck the people most at the moment in the King's speech was his reference to art and artists. In King Leopold's time, finance rather than art was honoured by the Sovereign. King Leopold did not ignore artists or deny them his patronage, but all knew that, with the exception of architecture and the arts of warfare, he had no real love for any of their works. King Albert, in making the reference he did to art, pleased the whole nation, for there exist few Belgians who are not artists or art lovers in one way or another.

CHAPTER II

The Romance of the Coburgs

The House of Coburg, to which Albert King of the Belgians belongs, springs from a warlike race which first won fame fighting in the great Thuringian forest against Attila and his Huns. The Thuringian Mark, or Margravate, was founded by Charlemagne to defend the line of the Saale against the Slavs. Near that river there stood in the twelfth century the Castle of Wettin from which the Coburgs took their family name.

The Margravate of Misnia became hereditary in the Wettin family in the time of Conrad the Great, who, born about 1098, became Margrave of Misnia in 1123. With Conrad began the romance of the Coburgs; the romance of a family which divided itself to conquer.

While other families, less wide in their aims, sought to consolidate their possessions in one male line, it was the policy of the Coburgs to slice their states amongst their scions, so that, if possible, every Prince of their race might wear a Sovereign's crown, or at least grasp a ruling Prince's sceptre. That policy,

inaugurated by Conrad, has in our day placed Princes of his house on the thrones of England, Belgium, Portugal, Bulgaria, and Coburg, and lesser German principalities, on whose shields the crown of rue is borne.

The gathering of riches, another policy of the Coburgs, began also with Conrad, who was surnamed the Rich and the Pious, as well as the Great. Conrad was a Palladin of the Empire and a pious defender of the Church. He figured in pilgrimages and crusades. This Prince had six sons, the youngest of whom entered the Church and died a bishop. In 1156 he divided his territories amongst his five other sons, and being assured that his race would prosper laid down his margrave's staff and entered as a lay brother into the monastery of Petersberg, where he died in 1157.

The sceptre of Misnia descended to Conrad's eldest son Otto, surnamed in his turn the Rich. Otto founded the abbey of Celle, and bestowed villages and land in the surrounding forest of Miriquidi on the Benedictine monks who served it.

The monks, clearing the forest, discovered rich silver mines. Otto promptly repossessed himself of the district, indemnifying the monks for the loss of their villages by a grant of a small town; and the mines were worked for the profit of the reigning house and of the populace with whom from those early days the Coburgs, true to another policy of their race,

shared their prosperity. The acquisition of the Landgraviat of Thuringia, and the Palatinate of Saxony by Henry the Illustrious, Otto's grandson, elevated the house of Wettin to the rank of the most powerful Princes; the importance of their States, commercially and politically, was equal to that of Austria and Bavaria, and had Henry wished he might have obtained Austria on the death of Duke Leopold VII. in 1246, whose daughter Constance he had married, but his Thuringian states contented him.

Exactly a century later, in 1346, the Wettins became possessed of the town and district of Coburg by the marriage of Frederick the Severe with Catherine of Henneberg. In 1425 that Prince's son, Frederick the Bellicose, was invested with the dignity of Elector of Saxony. In 1486 came the most famous division of the family's possessions; that between Ernest and Albert, sons of Frederick the Gentle, Elector of Saxony, founder of the Ernestine and Albertine lines. According to the family custom, the young brother, Albert, was allowed to choose his portion. He took Misnia, the modern Saxony, whose Kings descend from him; Ernest, the elder brother, retained the Electorate dignity and was ancestor of the Dukes of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha.

Ernest and Albert divided eighty-two populous and rich lordships between themselves. Their descendants continued gaily increasing and dividing their riches

and provinces until the time of Ernest the Pious, of the Ernestine line; that Prince divided his states amongst his seven sons. His eldest son, Frederick, to whose share Gotha fell, abolished the ancient custom of dividing the family territories by the creation of a sovereign state for each son, and established the law of primogeniture in its place. The other dukes of the house of Wettin followed his example, and thenceforward the younger sons of the family who desired to reign could find no ducal coronets for their brows, and were obliged to grasp at royal crowns.

Wide power, great dignity, and high estate belonged to the Coburgs long before they set foot on the steps of the English throne, or mounted that of Belgium. When England faced the frenzied forces of the French revolutionaries the army of her Continental allies was commanded by Duke Frederick Johan of Coburg, and the name of the Prince who defeated Dumouriez at Neerwinden was so execrated that during the Terror it was enough to call a man a friend of Pitt and Coburg to hurry him to the scaffold. The Coburgs refused to bow beneath Napoleon's yoke, and as long as the first Empire lasted they suffered for their temerity in doing so. Their territories were overrun by Napoleon's soldiers, and their treasuries were seized; but when Napoleon disappeared they regained their possessions. In Gotha the immediate ancestors of the Belgian King

held a state no monarch could surpass. Their palace at Gotha, Schloss Friedenstein, the palace of peace, was the largest royal palace in Germany. Set about with French gardens, it commanded a lovely view of the Thuringian forest, compared by English visitors to that of Windsor Castle. In his journal Frederick Stamford described the Court of Gotha early in the last century :

> " The arrangements of the palace here are on a scale of the most royal magnificence ; the number of servants (eighty) in splendid liveries ; the corps of chasseurs (thirty) in their brilliant uniforms, green and silver ; the duke's private band, besides the numerous suite of gentlemen, chamberlains, aides-de-camp, and the functionaries, gave sufficient indication both of wealth and liberality ; *in re culinaria*, neither Brillat Savarin, nor Sefton, of glorious memory, could have found fault—a blended cuisine, German and French, plenty of fine venison, and exquisite wines. Of the court functionaries it might be said, *implentiae vestris Bacchi pinguisque fermae*."

It was from this Court of Coburg there came the Prince whose destiny it was to have for a moment the Consort's crown of England within his grasp, to have accepted the crown of Greece, and, having refused that crown at the last moment, to become first King of the Belgians and founder of the Belgian

dynasty. Leopold of Saxe-Coburg was a cadet of the ducal family. He had shared in the vicissitudes of his family under Napoleon, he had tacitly defied the French Emperor when his power was greatest, and fought bravely in the armies of the Allies against Napoleon.

He came to London in 1815 endowed with all the gifts the fairy godmother, in her most generous mood, is supposed to bestow on favoured babies. His rank was of the highest, his personal beauty was great, he was learned in all the polite arts, a brilliant swordsman, a brave soldier, a gallant foe, a prudent wooer. The Prince Regent of England had chosen as husband for his daughter, who was then heir presumptive to the English crown, the Prince of Orange, another brave man but one who lacked every outward grace and whose manners, both in politeness and in sobriety, were the opposite of those of Leopold of Saxe-Coburg. Fortunately for her happiness Princess Charlotte had all the quick spirit and many of the wayward fancies of her mother, joined to the self-willed determination of her father's family. The moment she saw Prince Leopold she decided she would marry him, and mocking at her father's commands she broke her engagement to the Prince of Orange and engaged herself to Leopold of Saxe-Coburg. The Prince Regent stormed and threatened, and he blustered and swore so much that his daughter fled from his house and took refuge with her mother.

She was fetched back by one of her uncles, and for a time locked up like a naughty schoolgirl of those pre-Victorian days, a thing which amused her mightily. The idea of anyone, even he—Regent of the kingdom and her father—seeking to curb her will—she, heir as well as he to the English crown! The Princess's stubbornness outwore that of the Regent, whose greatest wish was to evade all worries. He consented to his daughter's engagement to Prince Leopold and their marriage took place on May 2nd, 1816.

For a time this royal couple lived an ideally happy life at Claremont, fourteen miles from London. Their happiness was ended by the untimely death of the Princess, but the King's short married life with the heir to the English throne influenced his whole future thoughts and actions, and has influenced to a great degree that of his descendants.

On his marriage with the Princess Charlotte, Prince Leopold had been naturalised an Englishman, granted a Field-Marshal's baton in the English Army, and given many other English dignities and privileges. The dignities and privileges he retained to the day of his death, but most of all he retained the sense that he was an Englishman, and on every occasion, even long after he had ascended the Belgian throne, he proudly displayed that relationship to the world. On the windows of many a church in Belgium there are emblazoned his arms quartering those of England.

On the ceilings of the palace at Brussels again these arms are emblazoned. The liveries of the Belgian Kings are the scarlet liveries of the English Royal House, but above all, what the Belgian royalties have clung to most is their close connection with English royalty and their share with the English Sovereigns in guiding the counsels of monarchs and with them in preserving the world's peace, or, when need arises, of with them defending by the sword the cause of justice.

Prince Leopold lived on in England after the death of Princess Charlotte. His sister married the Duke of Kent, and became the mother of Queen Victoria. When the Duke of Kent died Prince Leopold became the supporter and counsellor of his widowed sister. It was he who became chief adviser as to the education and instruction of the baby Princess, whom all but the little Princess herself already knew was destined to be Queen of England. He remained the Princess's chief adviser up to the moment of her accession and afterwards he was her strongest counsellor. He left England to become King of the Belgians. He did so to fulfil what he believed to be a great obligation, but brilliant though his prospects for the future were, he did not leave England in 1830 without regret. Long afterwards, when he was seated firmly on the Belgian throne in 1847, he revealed his thoughts to Firman Rogier, Belgian Minister to France, who reported the King's conversation to his

brother, Charles Rogier, then newly-appointed Belgian Prime Minister.

> "The King spoke to me of the fine position he had in England when he quitted it to come to Belgium, a position which would be magnificent to-day, for he would direct the affairs of that country. He exercised the greatest influence on everything there."

The close connection between the Belgian and English Courts thus begun, continued unbroken throughout their lives. King Leopold II. wrote a long weekly letter to his cousin Queen Victoria. That King, though he and the English Government differed towards the close of his life over questions relating to his colonial policy, sought at all times to preserve England's friendship. In his earlier days he was a frequent guest of the English Court, a frequenter of the meetings of learned societies in London; he was President of the English Literary Society, chief guest at banquets of the Royal Academy, and an ardent supporter of the Royal Geographical Society. It was the recital of the adventures of English travellers in Africa which more than anything else directed his thoughts towards African enterprise. It was on the advice of English explorers he began his Congo work, and with their aid he laid the foundations of the Congo State.

Whatever differences King Leopold II. had arising from the later development of his Congo policy, these in no way affected the relations between his brother's family and that of English royalties.

CHAPTER III

The King's Parents and Childhood

The relations between the family of Philip, Count of Flanders, second son of King Leopold I., brother of Leopold II. and father of King Albert, and those of the English Kings were at all times close. The Count of Flanders was a man who won the warm affection of all the English who had the good fortune to enter into relations with him. A good soldier, a cultured art lover, much of a bookworm, an ardent patriot who, to remain in the service of his native country, refused the crown of another kingdom, Philip, Count of Flanders, went through his life earnestly fulfilling his duties.

The ties which bound the Belgian Coburgs to England were strengthened by the marriage of the Count of Flanders with the Princess Marie of Hohenzollern. That noble lady, noted for her charity and piety, was fond of recalling the ancient tradition which traced the foundation of her house to St. Meinrad, who was born about the year 800 at Sulchen, a little Swabian town. The Countess of Flanders

descended from the elder Swabian branch of the Hohenzollerns. The House of Prussia, whose chief is now the German Emperor, descends from the junior branch, that of Franconia, which branched off from the main stem in 1217, so it can be seen that the relationship between the Hohenzollerns of King Albert's mother's family and the Hohenzollerns now warring with the civilised world is of the slightest. Notwithstanding that, until the German Emperor made it absolutely impossible, courteous friendship existed between the two families which bore the name of Hohenzollern. That this was so was due more to the patriotic forbearance of the Countess of Flanders's family than to the just actions of the Prussian House. Her father, Prince Charles Anthony, reigning Prince of Hohenzollern, was obliged in the year 1849 to abdicate his sovereignty in favour of the House of Prussia. He did so, forced by necessity, to spare his State from the evils its grasping neighbour threatened it with. In abdicating he said: "I have sacrificed the greatest honour which a mortal can enjoy in renouncing the crown in the interest of the country that I wish to serve with all the devotion of my heart."

It was not until 1861 that this mediatised Prince had his right to the title of Royal Highness recognised by Prussia.

Prince Charles Anthony of Hohenzollern, father of the Countess of Flanders and grandfather of King

Albert, married Princess Josephine of Baden, the eldest daughter of the Grand Duchess Stephanie de Beauharnais, whom Napoleon I. had adopted. One of this Princess's sisters was the Duchess of Hamilton, through whom the friendship of the family of Flanders and English Houses was strengthened.

The Countess of Flanders was fond of telling her children of her early visits to London. From her King Albert learned his first lessons in the love of this country.

"It was in 1856," wrote the Countess of Flanders, "that with my mother and my sister I visited my aunt, the Duchess of Hamilton. This was a great event for me, an everlasting joy. The first day we went to Brussels where we stopped at the Hotel de Flandres; the next day we went to London, and the crossing was very bad. A lady alongside me had herself placed in a sack and closed it over her head. Her husband lay alongside her and was very quickly ill. At Dover my uncle Hamilton and his sons Angus and Carlo received us. The train brought us all to London to my uncle's house near the Green Park. We spent twelve days there, during which we visited all the curiosities of London and its environs: Hampton Court, Sydenham and the Palace of the First Exhibition. What interested me most in all that I saw in London were the skeletons of antediluvian animals. The Tower with its historic

souvenirs impressed me greatly—above all the chamber where they assassinated Edward's children. Also Westminster Abbey and its numerous tombs. I remember having visited the Houses of Parliament and St. Paul's Cathedral, where we mounted up to the gallery which surrounds the great cupola and whence there is a wide view. Finally I remember a dinner at Greenwich, where they served us with the celebrated whitebait, a little fish found only in the Thames. The great event of our sojourn at London was the return of the troops from the Crimea. The whole town was en fête and Queen Victoria reviewed them. Everywhere where the army passed stands were erected. My uncle, my cousins and I were in the crowd near Hyde Park, not far from Buckingham Palace, seated on very primitive benches. The Queen of England and the Prince Consort were accompanied by all their children and by their uncle, King of the Belgians, Leopold II., and his sons, the Duke of Brabant and the Count of Flanders, and his daughter Princess Charlotte. Who could have thought then that a day would come when I would marry the Count of Flanders—that I was seeing my future husband pass ?

" On leaving London we went to Hamilton, the superb residence of my uncle, where the park is so immense that every day after lunch, which followed a morning devoted to work, my cousins

and I were able to make long promenades on horseback or on foot without ever arriving at the boundaries of the park. Games were also organised which amused me enormously, and we made excursions to Edinburgh and its environs.

"Holyrood, the residence of the Kings of Scotland, made a great impression on me. They showed us the bedroom of Mary Stuart, and the place where Rizzio was assassinated at her feet, the floor still stained with the blood of the victim. The rooms are very gloomy, and I understood the terror of my aunt who in the early years of her marriage lived there, the Duke of Hamilton being Knight-Marshal of Scotland. In our visits to Edinburgh, we entered some of the shops, and I have still in my possession some Scotch pebbles which my uncle bought to present to me. We went to Glasgow, that business town par excellence, full of dark smoke, but very interesting. There were there already at this time gigantic stores, in which one could buy everything, such as were not yet known on the Continent. The most beautiful of our excursions lasted two days and was to the Lakes. Unfortunately I cannot give the exact itinerary, but I know that we saw Loch Lomond and Loch Katherine, which Sir Walter Scott made the scene of his poem 'The Lady of the Lake,' and we slept in the Trossachs. After some weeks passed at Hamilton, we went to

the Isle of Arran, which belongs entirely to my uncle and is an enchanting place. The Goatfell, a high rocky mountain, made a great impression on me, and the castle, built in the English Gothic style, is very beautiful. The vegetation there has something meridional about it, on account of the Gulf stream which passes quite near it. Its climate is very moderate, and the fucshias grow there in bushes. The view of Arran was for us children, and I think for the grown-ups too, an enchantment. Every day we made delightful excursions there, and we went everywhere on horseback over this beautiful and wild country. At the extremity of the island there are great rocks which form many grottoes. It was in one of them that Robert Bruce, King of Scotland, hid himself after his defeat and cheered himself by watching the spider, which continually recommenced to make its web destroyed by other insects."

In 1867 the Count of Flanders and Princess Marie of Hohenzollern were married. They lived in Brussels at first in the right wing of the Royal Palace, later in the palace arranged for them in the Rue de la Regence, a beautiful and spacious building decorated in a sumptuous but pure style. The Countess of Flanders was a lover of music and the arts, a painter of considerable talent, an etcher of exquisite pictures, and an appreciative student of literature, while her husband, the Count of Flanders, was a real bibliophile. Their

life in Brussels, as in their lovely country places, passed with tranquil regularity. At eight o'clock in the morning the Count and Countess breakfasted together. Immediately after breakfast the Count of Flanders went to his library, where he regulated his day's employment and spent long hours in discussing questions of history and archæology with his learned librarian, Mr. Schweisthal, with whom he loved to discuss the purchase of his books and to decide on their bindings. The Count's library was an immense apartment. He spent long hours at his writing table in one of its rooms, the doors of which were draped with satin portières, whose clear colours harmonised deliciously and added to the tranquil appearance of the book-lined room. The light which entered the library was tempered so as to preserve the freshness of the 30,000 volumes which stood on its oak and mahogany shelves, covering in all an extent of one mile. The Count devoted the greater part of his life to reading and discussing the works of the great authors of all ages and countries. From his library he would pass to his smoking-room or from it to an inner sanctuary in which the most valuable and richly-bound volumes were placed. Many of the most exquisite bindings of these books were executed by the Countess herself, who loved to do work which pleased her husband. Learned like her husband in the English, French and Italian languages and conscientious as he in the discharge

of her duties, the Countess was able to co-operate with him in the education of their children.

It was in the Palace of the Rue de la Regence at Brussels that were born the children of this royal pair. Their eldest child, Prince Baudouin, was born there in June, 1869, Princess Henriette, Duchess of Vendôme and her twin sister, Princess Josephine, in 1870. The twin Princess Josephine died, and the name of Josephine was given to the next child of the Count and Countess of Flanders, who was born in 1872, and is now Princess Charles of Hohenzollern. Finally, in the Palace of the Rue de la Regence there was born on April 8th, 1875, the Count and Countess's younger son, who now reigns as Albert, King of the Belgians.

The Count and Countess devoted two whole hours every day to their children, who joined them every morning at their breakfast as soon as they were old enough to do so. Their eldest son, Prince Baudouin, received his early instruction in profane literature from his parents' librarian, and in religious knowledge from the priests of the parish in which their palace was situated. At fifteen years of age he entered the Military College, and later received a commission in the Army, in the Grenadiers Regiment, in which when he died he held the rank of Capitaine Commandant.

Mr. Godefroid, at present financial secretary to the King, was the first professor of His Majesty,

King Albert, who was instructed in Latin, law and political economy by Mr. Bosmans, LL.D., son of the President of the Court of Louvain; in philosophy and religious knowledge by Mgr. Lefebvre of Louvain, and in French literature and rhetoric by M. Sigogne. Later, when he became heir to the throne, King Albert was instructed in the arts of diplomacy by Belgium's greatest diplomatist, Baron Lambermont.

King Albert has a perfect knowledge of English, Flemish and other modern languages. He is very competent in mechanical arts, for which he has always had a special taste. By his own desire he followed a course of engineering instruction. He understands the construction of ships, steamboats and aeroplanes, has driven railway trains, and seeking to enter entirely into the lives of the people, has worked in mines. He is a skilled chauffeur, so sure of hand and quick of brain that, notwithstanding his occasional disregard of speed regulations, no accident has followed his daring, and no one who sits in a car driven by him is afraid.

It was the greatest pleasure of the Count and Countess of Flanders to walk on Sundays with their children in the park of Brussels or on the Boulevards or in the country near by, as is the custom of good citizens of the Belgian capital. On Sundays the whole family dined with King Leopold and Queen Marie Henriette, and while the Queen's health

remained good and she resided in Brussels the family of Flanders were frequent guests at her intimate musical receptions at which the Queen would play the harp, General Brunell, who had a magnificent voice, singing and the Count de Borchgrave d'Altena, head of the King's Cabinet, accompanying them on the piano.

The Count and Countess of Flanders were very hospitable; at Brussels, in their Ardennes château at Amerois, and in their villa at Hasli-Horn they received largely, and gave many house parties, at which young Prince Albert and their other children met the greatest of European personalities. The children's education was carried out on fixed plans. They were docile and studious and the family life advanced with happiness broken only by the shadow of sorrow caused by the loss of the little baby Princess Josephine. The first great sorrow it experienced was caused by the death of Prince Baudouin.

At the close of 1890 all the children of the house were stricken with illness. The first to suffer was Prince Albert, whose malady showed itself in the form of a dangerous catarrh. The illness spread from him first to his sister, the Princess Josephine, and then to Princess Henriette, whose condition became so grave that it was found necessary to publish bulletins of it. For many days the Princess's condition was critical, the anxiety of her parents and relatives was increased rather than diminished

by the fears of their friends and the public, who besieged the Palace of the Rue de la Regence, seeking for news and offering sympathy. On January 16th, 1891, the Count of Flanders was able to write to his brother, King Leopold, informing him that at last the Princess Henriette was pronounced out of danger.

On the 17th, Prince Baudouin was stricken by the illness, and, as is shown by a letter from the Count of Flanders to the King,* Prince Baudouin's condition was recognised as grave, but not considered so grave that it was necessary to publish bulletins relating to it. His illness developed into pleuro-pneumonia, and complications supervened so swiftly that though all the doctors' skill was exerted to save his life, the Prince died on January 23rd, 1891, after only four days' illness. The Prince died piously sustained by the consolations of religion.

Les Amerois remains the summer residence of King Albert and his family. There in his childhood the King passed six weeks every summer with his parents and their families. So numerous were the children and grandchildren gathered there every year by the Count and Countess of Flanders, that their family party was one huge romp. The presence of foreign queens—Queen Amelia of Portugal and

* The Chevalier Ed. Carton de Wiart, the King's Secretary, has had the kindness to draw my attention to this and other letters relating to Prince Baudouin's death which he preserved by the King's orders.

Queen Carolina of Saxony—and reigning Princes put no check upon their fun, for these august personages were their near relatives, and on the summer estate in holiday time all the older ones joined in amusing the young and sharing their games.

The Château of Amerois is reached by climbing a high hill from the quaint old town of Bouillon, which is built on each side of the Semois. The wide road leading to the château hugs the forest, sometimes passing through its outskirts. From the little city, which is still dominated by the great walls of its ancient château, until one reaches Les Amerois, no building is met with except the Custom House and a miserable wayside inn "La Hutte de Nicholas Dumoulin," a poor old man, for whom the King's mother, the Countess of Flanders, built a wooden cabin before which she and her children often stopped their carriage to speak with him as they passed.

From the terrace before Les Amerois there is a wide view embracing the valley of the Semois, and reaching to distant hills covered with primeval pines, through breaks in which one sees a summit whence the coast of France itself can be seen at Carignan and St. Valfroy.

Like the Palace at Brussels, the Château of Les Amerois is filled with chef-d'œuvres and family portraits and relics; there are paintings of the King's father and mother, of himself and the Queen, and of their children and their many cousins. The hall on

the ground floor is magnificent. It has a high Flemish chimneypiece surrounded by trophies hung with Belgian flags and surmounted by the national arms. The dining-room is hung with Cordova leather; its chimneypiece was carved by the Italian brothers Lombardi.

One of the most remarkable things in the Château of Les Amerois, is the monumental staircase purchased by the Count of Flanders at the Paris Exhibition of 1878.

Standing in one of the lovely avenues of the park is a chapel on the stained glass windows of which are pictured the patron saints of the family: St. Albert, St. Philip, St. Joseph, St. Henry, St. Baudouin and St. Meinrad. The carpet which covers the floor was embroidered by the Countess of Flanders, the present Queen, the Princesses and Dames of Honour of the family and all the ladies who during the years it was being made visited Les Amerois. Their names and armorial bearings are inscribed on a parchment ornamented by pupils of the St. Luc school, which hangs in the vestibule of the chapel, where there is also seen the silver palm sent to the King's mother and father by Pope Pius IX. on their marriage day.

At Les Amerois in the King's childhood and ever since until the war caused a break in the family gatherings, the royal family and their guests assembled for *déjeuner* at one o'clock, and for dinner in the evening. The afternoon was spent in excursions in

the environs or in long promenades through the wooded walks of the park, where the air is cooled by the myriads of streams which cascade down the hillside. A favourite morning walk is to the farm of Amerois, in which a room was specially furnished for rustic receptions. The walls of this room are covered with enamelled tiles painted by the Queen and the Princesses.

Hidden among the trees of this wonderful park are found beautiful gardens and greenhouses. Any one may pass through here; all day long, in times of peace, there is an unending flow of mendicants to the château, where the generous distribution of clothes, money and food is unceasing. It was the wish of the King's parents, and is the wish of King Albert himself, that all who come should receive bounties. But the King's parents were not—and King Albert and Queen Elizabeth are not—content to await the coming of the applicants. At Les Amerois the royal family has always been in the habit of seeking out all those in need who lived within reach of their residence that they might aid them. The boldest beggar who came to the château was not refused aid; the most timid who stayed away was not allowed to want. So great is the charity of the royal owners of this lovely country seat, that children for miles around know that no evil money can cure can exist there. Thousands of letters, written in naïve language, fill the letter-bag

of the château. These letters contain requests from children, but cannot be classed among ordinary begging letters. They are appeals for help to proved friends.

It was not only the beggars who were welcomed at Les Amerois—everyone was happy there. Games of bowls and other outdoor games in which the relatives share are organised for the servants, and on family festivals and religious feast days the villagers are welcomed to similar entertainments. At these parties the village children sing songs and share in lotteries, for which no one pays any entrance money and in which all gain prizes!

I write of Les Amerois as it was throughout the King's childhood and until this present year, when war has forced its generous owners to retire. One dreads its present condition, but no news has reached us that it has been despoiled and we may hope that when the war is happily ended the old life will be resumed there amid its family surroundings and with its household goods undestroyed.*

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* Unfortunately the news has come since these lines were written. The *Metropole*, published with the *Standard* of January 13th, 1915, contains a telegram describing the sack of Les Amerois "from cellar to garret" by the Germans, who, if the news be true, spared nothing, not even the portrait of the Kaiser, found in the entrance hall, with the autograph inscription, "To my dear Marie"—that is, to the Countess of Flanders; and who took away all that was valuable and portable, even the Queen's notepaper.

CHAPTER IV

The Prince at the Military School

Up to the time of the death of his elder brother in 1891, Prince Albert, who was then seventeen years of age, had led a life studious but unnoticed. Like all continental Princes he was destined for the Army, but his passage through it as a younger son would have attracted little attention. As it was, it was as future heir that he entered the Belgian Military School then situated in the picturesque old buildings of the ancient Abbaye de la Cambre, in the hollow near the ponds which form such a pleasing view from the Avenue Louise, near the entrance to the Bois de la Cambre. The Prince was even then imbued with the consciousness of his duties. His constant preoccupation gave him a shy and hesitating air, the cause of which men long mistook. It was a tall, lanky, almost ungainly youth, whom his tall and commanding uncle, King Leopold II., introduced in a set speech to his future schoolfellows and masters. King Leopold was an apt speaker and his allusions, if the military students laughed at them, brought ready blushes mantling to the Prince's cheeks.

The Belgian Army in its officers was even then democratic. Save for the crack regiments of the Guards and Lancers, most of whose officers belonged to the nobility, its officers were drawn almost entirely from the lower middle classes. Outsiders did not until quite recently take the Belgian Army as a serious one, but the Belgians themselves did, and have always done so. While the officers' pay was small and their promotion slow, their work was always hard and their chances of gaining glory remote. The wearing of epaulettes in Belgium brings with it no brevet of nobility. If a man who enters the Belgian Army as an officer belongs by birth to the noble class, he naturally mixes with his peers, but an officer who is not by birth a noble or whose riches are not sufficiently great to enable him to bridge the gulf which socially separates the noble from the other classes, he remains an outsider. Therefore while those nobles who sought a military career confined themselves to the crack regiments, few of the fairly well-to-do middle classes joined the other regiments, and for the most part Prince Albert's fellows at the military school were drawn from the ranks, as has been said, of the smaller middle class—good, sturdy lads, well-bred enough, but with little knowledge of the home life or manners of the upper classes. These were shy at first at having to mix with the young Prince and the Prince's seeming timidity did not at the first moment help to set them

at their ease. But they speedily found out that he was not only a good fellow but one seriously devoted to his career. In England up till yesterday—that is in the piping times of peace—when swotters were hated by all schoolboys, whether at Woolwich, Sandhurst, Eton or St. Paul's—a Prince determined to study profoundly would soon be taught his place, especially if he invited his fellows, with transparent sincerity, to do so without hesitation. He would then be set down as something even worse than a swotter—a prig. In Belgium, however, even schoolboys take things seriously and the paths of all were smoothed by the Prince's desire to study, and made gay by his desire to be treated by his fellows as one of themselves.

Study at the Belgian Military School does not exclude play, and ragging is as prevalent there as in any institution in England. Once they were convinced that the Prince was earnest in his wishes, his fellows set out to satisfy them, and they did so to the full. He was ragged right gloriously, given a nickname which still clings to him amongst those who were his fellows in these early days, and he bravely bore it all. His parents saw to it that, so far as they could help it, his wish to fill the place of an ordinary pupil should be satisfied. He did not live in the school, it is true, and naturally he had his special tutor, but in all things else he was treated exactly the same as the other pupils. He wore the same uniform as they did—a becoming one, it may

be said; shared their meals as well as their lessons, and his pocket money was no larger than that of the average boy amongst them. This, perhaps, was the one thing which Prince Albert regretted, for he was at all times generous, and he would have liked to share abundantly cigarettes and other cadets' delights with those whose pocket money was below the average. However, he did his part and he passed through the school with credit, winning the respect of his masters and the love of his schoolfellows which he has retained up to the present, for he is one of those who never drops an old friend.

The pupils of the Military School held no rank higher than private soldier, and salute, and are subject to the commands of, the lowest non-commissioned officer in the regular army. Prince Albert never forgot this when he was a schoolboy, and he was most punctilious in the discharge of his duties towards his superiors, both non-commissioned and commissioned. It was not only his fellow-schoolboys and superiors whose respect and love he gained; he gained also that of all the common soldiers with whom he came into contact. The Belgian Army in those days was very different from the Belgian Army of to-day. It existed largely on paper and even on paper it did not amount to 100,000 men. The entrance to the Military School was by competitive examination, but large exceptions were made and facilities given to the sons of officers. There

was always a military caste, though one with few privileges of caste, in the country.

Private soldiers were recruited nominally by a voluntary system, but since there were then few volunteers it was really one formed by conscription. However, only the poorest classes served in it. The number of men required every year for the army was infinitely less than the number of young men of fit age and physique. Therefore, instead of calling up all to serve, an annual lottery was held, those only who drew the numbers from one up to the required amount being nominally obliged to serve. Even those had not to serve if they could pay for substitutes. The Government, with a keen eye to the main chance, required everyone who had to take part in the lottery and who, if they drew what was called a bad number—that is one obliging them to serve—would buy a substitute, to deposit a certain sum with them which would go towards the payment of the substitute were one ultimately required, or be retained by the Government for its own profit if no substitute was required. If those who had made such payments drew a good number freeing them from service they heard no more of the matter. If they drew a bad number a substitute was provided for, and they had to make a further payment to him of about £40, the total cost to them of the substitute being between £60 and £70.

The Belgians are a thrifty people. Service in the

army extended over several years, and it is only the very poor who could not earn in that period more than double the cost of a substitute. Therefore all but the very poorest, and those few who were keen on service in the ranks, either from their savings or by borrowing, found the money to buy substitutes. The result was that outside of the service itself, the army was held in little esteem. The marvellous thing is that under such a system its morale remained good.

The wiser citizens of Belgium and each of its Kings hated this system and worked for its abolition. King Leopold II. went far towards achieving it. His very last act when he lay dying was to sign a new law which worked towards this end. One of the first and most beneficial acts of King Albert's reign was its total abolition. But while Prince Albert was a military student the system was in full force and the army was recruited from what would be called the dregs of the people, were it not that in Belgium the dregs were so few, even amongst the poorest, that they were negligible.

Although he hated the system which brought most of the common soldiers into the army, the Prince did not share the contempt too commonly held by his fellow pupils and the officers of the army for those whom poverty or a desire to serve had led to offer themselves as paid substitutes, or, as it was called in Belgium, "to sell their skin."

Officers were too fond of showing their contempt for the paid volunteer and their admiration for those few who though they could buy substitutes had chosen to perform their duty and serve when the lots they drew designed them for service. The Prince treated all soldiers equally. His doing so won the love for him which the Belgian Army manifests so well to-day and which has contributed in no small way to its glorious achievements in the present war.

CHAPTER V

Studies and Travels of an Heir-Apparent

As has been told the early education of King Albert was conducted most carefully by tutors chosen by his parents, and under his parents' eyes. As he approached manhood he probably knew more than most boys of his age who have passed through public schools and universities ; but excessive conscientiousness has ever been his characteristic, and when the death of his elder brother made him heir to the throne he felt that his knowledge of what a King should know was in many ways deficient, and set himself to study with intense earnestness. A King must be a soldier and a diplomatist above all things. His military education was directed by General J. Jungblüth with a good sense and firmness, which the King himself was the first to appreciate and for which he has remained ever grateful. General Jungblüth was at that time Chief of the Staff of the Belgian Army ; he is now King Albert's chief adviser.

For education in diplomacy Prince Albert sat at the feet of Baron Lambremont, who won for Belgium the

freedom of the Scheldt and was universally admitted to be Belgium's chief diplomatist and one of the greatest in Europe. Under General Jungblüth the Prince had as instructor M. Sigogne, who is supposed to have imbued him with many of his principles and whose work on sociology with very advanced Liberal or Socialist tendencies, which was published while he was still in the Prince's entourage, is believed to have expressed the Prince's views, if not to have been directly inspired by the Prince himself.

For political economy he studied, and still studies, the questions of the day with that profound economist, M. Waxweiler, Director of the Solvay Institute at Brussels, a Sociological Institute founded by the great Liberal manufacturer and millionaire, M. Solvay.

In his desire for learning and information Prince Albert sought as instructors the men most eminent in their particular paths. In Belgium, a country which, until German burnings and other happenings took place, possessed Catholic, Freemason, Undenominational, Liberal and Socialist Universities, there were learned men of equal, or almost equal, eminence belonging to every party and shade of religion, but it so happened that those whom King Albert chose for his advisers were for the most part men of marked Liberal or even Socialist tendencies. This was commented on adversely, whereupon the Prince went to M. Beernaert, ex-Prime Minister, leader of the moderate Catholics and one of the wisest

men in Belgium, to seek his advice. The advice given to the Prince was good. Mr. Beernaert counselled him not to dismiss the professors in whom he trusted or to moderate his friendly intercourse with the learned men whom he respected, but to add to their number some whose Catholicity could not be questioned. Thenceforward, at the Prince's invitation, there came regularly several times a week to discuss questions of sociology with him, two clergymen, Father Veersmerch, the learned Jesuit Sociologist and Economist—whose writings on the Congo, in which criticism of King Leopold was not spared, are perhaps better known than his still more valuable statistical works on the Belgian Working Classes—and the learned Dominican, Father Rutten. The visits of these clergymen were quite as constant as those of the Liberal professors, but, the clergymen mixing less with the world and society, they were not so much noised abroad, and the erroneous impression remained that the Prince drew his information only from Liberal sources of knowledge.

"The Prince did everything a prince should do," says a Belgian writer. "He had his military education at the National Military School like all Princes. He had seriously accomplished a term of service in the army like all Princes. At his majority he made the grand tour, like all Princes, but he did not, like all Princes, even write a book."

This is true, but yet conveys a false impression. The Prince's travels were very unlike those which most Princes take. In 1898 he travelled in America, where, under the guidance of the great railroad magnate and art lover, Mr. James J. Hill, he made a serious study of railroad matters.

In 1908 he went to Belfast and to the other great ports of the United Kingdom, disguised, it is said, as a newspaper reporter, in order to carry out untrammelled investigations into ship-building and the lives and conditions of ship-builders and fishermen.

In the first speech he made in the Senate it will be found that he spoke of his investigations in England into these matters.

His travels all over Europe to the various Courts as a Prince were of course of a princely nature, but his voyage to the Congo was again of a most practical kind and bore fruitful results, most beneficial to the natives.

CHAPTER VI

Travel in the Congo

On Monday, August 16th, 1909, Antwerp, Belgium's greatest port, was *en fête*. From every house in the city, from every ship in the docks and at the quays, flags floated gaily. The whole population of Antwerp, and many from other parts of Belgium, pressed towards the quays to meet the incoming Congo steamer, the *Bruxellesville*. They were hastening to witness and welcome what the Antwerp papers of the moment called the "*joyeuse entrée* of Prince Albert." It was truly a great day for the Belgian people, and, perhaps, the happiest in the lives of many, for they realised that the Prince's re-entry from his successful voyage to the Congo marked the commencement of a new and great era in their history.

That voyage commenced on April 3rd at Southampton, and terminated at Antwerp on August 16th. From Broken Hill to Boma he travelled for eighty-two days, following a route which extended over 2,720 miles, covering 750 miles on land, 1,570 miles on the rivers, and 400 by rail.

Travel in the Congo

In founding his Congo state King Leopold had been animated by noble ideas, and much of the work carried out in the Congo under his directions was most noble. What the King did for the natives' good, and for the development of the Congo, for the advancement of the interests of the Belgian nation there, can be denied by no just man. But there were accusations brought against the Congo Government which, true or false, weighed heavily on the upright and humane Belgian people. They hailed with joy the announcement that Prince Albert, heir not only to the Belgian throne, but at that time heir also by the will of King Leopold, its founder, to the absolute sovereignty of the Congo, had resolved to go to the Congo himself, accompanied only by his personal and trusted advisers, and by boat, on foot, and on bicycle, to travel through the country from one end to the other, examining into everything, and seeing everything with his own eyes; listening to all the natives had to say, and informing himself, without heeding personal interests or official protests, what the real condition of the country was, and what should be done to remedy the natives' grievances, if native grievances existed. For they realised that having seen the state of the country, a conscientious Prince when he became Sovereign would insist that any fault which existed in its government was instantly and completely remedied. It was for this reason that, with still greater joy than they had evinced

at the announcement of his departure, they welcomed his return from the voyage successfully achieved. In the eyes of all the world the success of the voyage was evident. No hitch had marred it. While the Prince was traversing the country from east to west, from the Rhodesian frontier downward by the great river to the sea, the Belgian Colonial Minister, M. Jules Renkin, accompanied by his wife, was travelling upwards in the opposite direction, also to see the country for himself. The hardships each faced were similar. They proved too severe for the Minister, who had to discontinue his voyage and return to Brussels earlier than he intended, though not before he had gained an insight into the condition of the country. The robust constitution of the young Prince enabled him to sustain with ease and even gaiety all the myriad inconveniences of travel in the savage, equatorial country. As he passed along he pried and peered into everything. If ever there was a chiel taking notes amongst the officials, the factors and the missionaries of the Congo State, Prince Albert was he, but he did his princely prying with such complete diplomacy and urbane courtesy, he charmed all and affrighted none. To the white women of the little Belgian community his coming was an ever memorable event. He was never too busy or too fatigued to play his part at the receptions they arranged in his honour. Above all, with the natives his coming was a success. The savages are

not too savage to know what a great King is, or to comprehend what a benefit the personal visit of a benevolent Prince can prove. The news spread far and fast that "He, the tall Man, Breaker of Stones," for such was the title they gave him, was in the Congo. From all parts the natives flocked to see him, some with tales of evil treatment to be redressed, others with claims of petty chieftancy to be allowed, all hugely curious. All left the Prince's presence delighted. "The Tall Man, Breaker of Stones" was not yet sovereign and could not confer land or special privileges, but he could distribute smiles and gifts, which he did most liberally. Moreover, he laughed and joked with all, until his name became traditional, and to this day the natives swear he is the greatest of Kings and the best of good fellows.

The Prince's return was auspicious. Princess Elizabeth met her husband at Teneriffe, and her meeting with him on his return from his long voyage was one which left a most pleasing impression on all who witnessed it. At Teneriffe the Princess had put out in an electric launch from the port to meet the Prince's steamer, and as soon as it was alongside she had run up the ladder which was let down from the side of the great ship, and flung herself into her husband's arms with a display of love which was clearly genuine.

On the morning of the arrival at Antwerp the air rang with *vivas* as royalty after royalty arrived to

meet the Prince. The Prince's mother, the Countess of Flanders, came accompanied by her little sons Leopold and Charles, and the little Princess Marie José ; the Duke and Duchess of Vendome and a large suite also came.

On the Quay Jordans a marquee was erected, and there the Princes and the high functionaries of the Government awaited the arrival of the steamer. At two o'clock the boat was moored at the quay ; on its poop stood the Prince in the full uniform of a general, to which grade he had been promoted but one or two days previously by his uncle the King, accompanied by the Princess and his companion on the voyage, Baron de Moor. His mother and children went on board, and most affectionate greetings passed between them, both the Prince and the Princess being deeply moved. The whole party disembarked immediately ; the Prince was then welcomed in a set speech delivered by the Burgomaster of Antwerp, who spoke in Flemish. The Prince replied to him in Flemish also. He said :

"I am profoundly touched by the welcome you have accorded me. I thank you for the amiable words you have pronounced in the name of the town of Antwerp. My wife unites with me in expressing to you our thanks. Like me, she will sign with pleasure your Golden Book. Say to the population of Antwerp that this day will remain unforgettable for us ; say how much I have

been moved this morning in returning to the country, by the magnificent spectacle of this vast port—the artery of our commerce and our industry, which unites Belgium with every corner of the globe. I feel a special pleasure in finding myself here again. Have not the citizens of Antwerp been among the first to understand that a colonial policy is necessary to Belgium; have they not always seconded the King in the accomplishment of his daring and incomparable work? Twenty-two years ago King Leopold II., sustained by an unyielding energy, tackled the problem of the colonisation of Central Africa with remarkable perspicacity. History will never forget that the King, with his eyes fixed on the future of Belgium, has solved the problem by associating the Belgians with his patriotic efforts. I was full of hope for the future of the Congo, but what I saw there has surpassed my hopes. I have traversed our colony from one end to the other. I am still under the influence of that marvellous country. From the high plateaux of the Katanga to the mouth of the Congo, Nature has given in that magnificent country inexhaustible resources to men of energy and initiative. My conviction is that the colony will contribute to the prosperity of Belgium. Without doubt, sacrifices will be necessary, but they will be fruitful. Besides, in the life of races every step in progress is marked by new efforts and sacrifices.

It is in pursuing the moral elevation of the natives, in ameliorating their material situation, in combating the evils from which they suffer, and multiplying the ways of communication—that we will assure the future of the Congo."

This, of course, was an official speech, but there was much in it worth citing to-day, when Antwerp is so strangely situated. It is pleasing, and, at the same time, sad to remember how proud and gay the great city was. Antwerp has a character quite her own—those who call her Germanic are strangely mistaken. Those in Belgium who know Antwerp best, and like to mock in kindly manner at its citizens for what is most characteristic in them, call them señors, and truly there is something of Spanish dignity and the enjoyment of life which is found in Spain, lingering still in the city which the Spanish ruled over long. But, above all, Antwerp is Flemish, as, by the speeches in Flemish, the Prince and Burgomaster took care to mark that day.

The touch of real affection between the Prince and people, and the family touch which the Prince's little children gave to the ceremony was most marked. Street vendors throughout the day were selling picture postcards of the Royal Family, and crying out: "I will sell you the family of Prince Albert for a penny."

At that time the little Prince Leopold was a grave young man of eight. His brother Charles was some-

what gayer, but gayest of all was the Princess Marie José. A sad catastrophe almost marred her gaiety. At Antwerp the grave and reverend Burgomaster presented each of the royal party with a large album, specially prepared with views of the city and port. Princess Marie José cared little about books, but the cardboard boxes, nearly as big as herself, which held them took her fancy, and, in the prettiest manner possible, she begged for them. It was at the Brussels Railway Station that disaster befel her—she lost her doll. She and a journalist started off to look for it. In the midst of their search they were disturbed by an agitated aide-de-camp who rushed up, saying: "Your Royal Highness, your mother wants you." Sadly, but immediately, her Royal Highness, aged three, toddled off. Obedience is enforced in the royal nurseries of Belgium.

CHAPTER VII

The Prince's Public Life

Prince Albert's first appearances, on his own initiative, before the public were those of a philanthropist. The life of an heir-apparent is difficult, the life of an heir-presumptive is exceedingly difficult, and the Prince's path during his uncle's reign was no easy one. King Leopold never ceased to regret the death of his only son. He did not treat his heir in any manner other than was proper, but the Prince and his parents wisely felt that it was right to show excessive respect for the King's wishes, and deference to him. The result was, that while eager to take his part in the nation's work, the Prince placed a restraining hand upon himself. He showed himself at all times the most conscientious of men. From the moment that his brother's death made him heir to the throne he threw himself into his studies of the difficult craft of kingship in a thorough manner. His parents had taught him to take a real interest in the welfare of the poor, his marriage with Princess Elizabeth, philanthropic daughter of a philanthropic

father, increased his bent towards philanthropy. Unintentionally, doubtless, the Prince and his wife specialised in their philanthropy. The Princess took women and children under her special care. Prince Albert made himself the protector of fisher-folk.

The Count of Flanders died on November 17th, 1905. In the following month, debates upon the standing and career of Prince Albert were raised in both the Chamber and the Senate on the occasion of the granting of his annual allowance. The Civil List of the King remained at £132,000; that of Prince Albert's mother was left unaltered at her husband's death at £2,000; that of the new heir to the throne was fixed, on the Government's proposal, at £8,000. The sum was not an excessive one, but some Liberals and all the Socialists opposed it on the strange grounds that the Prince's grandfather, King Leopold I., had made good and prudent use of the sums allowed to him for his Civil List. It was not pretended that King Leopold I. had failed to fulfil his duties as a King, had been wanting in generosity, or had lived shabbily, but it was said that although he kept up a fitting royal state, he, who had come penniless to Belgium, had died worth £3,000,000, which he bequeathed to his children, the major portion of which should now descend to Prince Albert.

King Leopold I. had come, it is true, penniless to

Belgium, but he had done so because he placed his faith in the Belgians and Belgian generosity. He had resigned a magnificent income and high position in England to ascend the Belgian throne at a moment when Belgium was at war with a powerful neighbour, and the stability of that, then, newly-created kingdom was more than doubtful.

The debate which took place in the Chamber in the closing days of December, 1905, bore the strongest proof of the good qualities, as well as the popularity with all classes, of the Prince now heir to the throne.

Praise by the Government of the young Prince and his actions might be looked upon as official and discounted, but the speeches of those who declared themselves Republicans and Socialists and attacked the vote were just as full of praise and lacking in blame as anything the Prime Minister himself had said, and their sincerity is beyond doubt.

"I oppose this vote," said M. Daens, a rabid Radical, speaking in Flemish, "because by passing it you will make the Prince hateful. In passing such a vote which calls for fresh taxation we, the men of the people, who know our poor classes and see what they have to deprive themselves of to pay the taxes, see our workmen suffering Spanish misery—we consider your action worthy of scoundrels. Prince Albert does not deserve to be made odious in the eyes of the people. He

is compassionate and generous-hearted. I have proof of it. Recently I visited at the hospital of Brussels an unfortunate workman of Gijseghen, father of seven children. On the advice of one of his neighbours I wrote to Prince Albert and received at once a banknote for him. Some days later I received from the Princess a letter asking me how the sick man was. I replied that he was cured, but that another workman—a brickmaker—from Velsique, had taken his place in the hospital, and again I received a sum of money to help the unfortunate man. Some days afterwards the first of these two invalids came to me and asked me to give him the money to buy a little cart and a dog to draw it. I wrote to the Prince again and he sent me another banknote for him."

M. Daens's speech continued for a considerable time in the same strain, with similar illustrations of the generosity of the Prince and his wife.

M. Feron, a Liberal of less advanced views, spoke in the same strain. His argument was that the Prince's income should be supplied by the King.

"Our opposition," he said, "has no character of hostility to Prince Albert. We know the good he does, but we consider that his income is quite sufficient for his needs."

The Liberal leader, M. Hymans, declared that in

accord with several of his friends he would vote for the project.

"Prince Albert," he said, "devotes himself to the labours which are necessary to an apprenticeship to royalty, most conscientiously. He fulfils his duties, neglecting none of the obligations which his situation imposes on him."

M. Vandervelde, the Socialist Leader, said:

"I speak only to reply to the reproach that in opposing this new money vote we are seeking a malodorous popularity in speculating on the ignorance of the working classes. You have no right to reproach the working classes with their ignorance. Their ignorance is your fault. If they were intelligent you would not be here."

In the Senate the speeches were of the same tone. The Socialist M. Elbers opposed the vote, but praised the Prince.

"Prince Albert is a good youth," he said. "I admit that he occupies himself with political economy and Socialism, and keeps himself *au courant* with the workers' movement; tries to fit himself for the position he will one day occupy, but none of these necessitates the voting of a pension to him in such a hurry, while votes for the benefit of workmen take years to discuss."

M. Elbers expressed a hope that if people wished Prince Albert to succeed one day to the throne of King Leopold, the Senate would occupy itself with educational laws. The Socialist Senator, with more foresight than the leader of his party in the Chamber, declared that if the Prince was to be King and the constitution upheld, the people should be educated. The vote being passed, no more was heard of the Prince in parliament for some time.

In the closing days of May, 1906, Prince Albert was in Spain representing the Belgian Court at the marriage of King Alfonso and Queen Victoria. The first rumour that reached Brussels that something untoward had happened was in a telegram sent by the Prince to his wife telling her that he was in good health. The Princess was then in a delicate state of health, and her husband and friends surrounded her with every precaution. Yet the telegram announcing that her husband, whose robust constitution led her to believe no malady could strike him, was well, filled the Princess with alarm. To her, at least, the news of the attempt came as a relief. Undoubtedly, she sympathised with those who had suffered by the outrage; but coming after the first ambiguous telegram she was filled with rejoicing at the news that her husband, as well as the newly-married King and Queen, were safe.

The ardour for travelling for purposes of business or instruction that marked his forerunners was already

manifest in Prince Albert. Returned from Spain he remained only long enough in Brussels to travel from one railway station to another to resume his journey towards Paris, where an official duty called him.

June found the Prince and his family installed in Ostend, but for him Ostend was only his head-quarters, and before the month was out he had sailed in the *Prince Charles* to study deep-sea fishing.

Returning in July, he raised the question of establishing an Orphanage for fishermen's children, and promoted the purchase in England of a vessel to be used as a training ship. This training ship, the *Ibis*, was established at Ostend. Sturdier or happier young seamen than the lads who manned it could not be imagined. Prince Albert with his little sons mixed constantly amongst them and much of his sons' sturdiness is due to the love of the sea with which he imbued them, and to the manner in which he encouraged them to mix with the sailor lads in their work and play.

Although Belgian men of affairs had fought shy of every attempt made to induce them to lend their money or give their time to the formation of a Belgian Marine, they had, some years before the Prince entered into active political life, generously contributed to the formation of the Belgian Polar Expedition, which under the command of M. de Gerlache had

achieved such success and reaped so rich a scientific harvest in the southern Polar regions.

One of the most prominent of M. de Gerlache's companions on the *Belgica* was the well-known scientist Henry Artowski. Like all who have voyaged in the Polar regions in the cause of science, from the days of Cook and Franklin to those of Scott and Shackleton, the call of the Pole has rung continually in Artowski's ears. A Belgian by education, affection and adoption, M. Artowski turned to Belgium to aid him in the formation of a new Polar expedition to the as yet unconquered South Pole.

Under the high patronage of Prince Albert and the presidency of M. Beernaert, the venerable Belgian statesman, an international Polar Congress was held in Brussels in September, 1906, which was attended by the greatest Polar navigators and scientists from all parts of the world.

Prince Albert attended the meetings and receptions of this Congress at which good work was done in mapping out the future work of Polar regions in such a manner that each explorer should aid the other, while none should waste his time in following already trodden paths.

The heir to the Belgian throne is, as such, a member of the Senate.

King Leopold II., when Duke of Brabant, had sat in that body and spoken in it on subjects connected with Belgian expansion. He was already in his mind

the empire builder he afterwards became in fact. Prince Albert followed his example in speaking, but sought in no way to rival the performance of the Prince who had been his predecessor in the Senate and whose successor he is on the throne. His aims we now know were as lofty as those of any of his forerunners; but he wisely confined himself at the moment to working for the people in a manner which should rouse no jealousy in the minds of the most autocratic sovereign, though one certain at the same time to win the people's love and advance their interests.

His first speech in the Senate, made in 1908, was on the development of Belgian shipping. Speaking from his place in the middle of the semi-circle to a crowded house, he said:

"I need not say that all that concerns the Marine merits in the highest degree the attention of our country. Belgium is dependent on her general commerce, and it is by her exports to a large extent that she gains her daily bread, and literally this is a question for us of life or death. In order to reach distant markets, we must have the power of disposing of means of transport well equipped and well organised. From this point of view the superiority of national Lines cannot be questioned. People are never better served than by themselves. A new industry is a real benefit, above all when it consists of an industry unlimited

by its very nature, and one in which several countries find their principal resources. These are admitted truths. It is a long time since they were exposed here with singular firmness by the King, then Duke of Brabant. If I resume the same subject to-day it is not only because I am myself animated by the vivid desire of seeing our maritime industries developed—it is because the object under discussion leads up to it. It pleases me to recall in the first place that our country has known how to participate in the elaboration of a new international law, following a rule which has not failed to gain for us unanimous homage in foreign countries. Although our Marine is actually of small importance—I would not like to quote the figures relating to it—Belgium, thanks to eminent jurists, has taken a considerable part in researches relative to the perfecting of Maritime Law. These studies were the principal objects of two international Congresses assembled in 1885 and 1888, the first at Antwerp and the second in Brussels.

"At these Congresses, at which there were present notabilities in the Maritime Law of Europe, there were adopted the outlines of a code to be submitted to all nations with a view to becoming on the ocean the world's law. But we know that progress is rarely accomplished by single effort, and realisation of the desires formulated at Antwerp and Brussels has been slow. Far from

being discouraged, our compatriots formed an international committee in which all countries having maritime interests were represented. I congratulate myself on seeing the headquarters of this Committee established in our country. Substantial results have already been obtained. It was the Belgian Government which assembled at Brussels, in 1895, a diplomatic Conference in which twenty-one States co-operated. The Plenipotentiaries signed a protocol recommending unanimously to their Governments the adoption of the conventions which were there drawn up.

"In the course of last summer the questions of maritime hypothecation and the privileges and responsibilities of armaments were studied and discussed at Venice. At that time again, despite the differences of the laws in force, unanimous accord was arrived at. This was a fact without precedent, and shows that there prevails all over the world a current of progressive and equitable ideas. In Belgium we see the Parliament occupying itself practically and from various points of view with the question of the Marine. For a long time there did not exist sufficient harmony between economic realities and legal prescriptions. The progress of navigation was impeded because antiquated laws regulated maritime transactions.

"To-day Parliament has before it a Bill on

responsibility and mortgage. It is brought before us with the deep advantage of thorough examination by experts under the patronage of the Belgian Association for the Unification of Maritime Law. That is to say, that the work in which the Senate is invited to collaborate and on which the exposé of our rapporteur throws a vivid light, is certain to receive the approbation of all those who have at heart the expansion of our Marine. This Bill, founded on pure principles, responds to the practical necessities of the greatest importance, and will exercise a great influence on the development of our Merchant Marine.

" In procuring for our shipowners the advantages of good legislation, which will encourage their initiative and ensure its success, mortgage is the real security of the credit necessary to all enterprises, indispensable to those which, like Marine armaments require considerable capital. We must congratulate ourselves, moreover, on the fact that the project contains provision for lighterage. Interior navigation plays a considerable rôle, and has an important place alongside the railways, and contributes as much as these to ensure the transport industry.

" At the moment when our lighterage industry is passing through a transitional crisis, it would be opportune to offer to it the benefit of a good law on hypothecation and surrender. By appropriate

legislation the same benefits might be extended to constructions which are not commercial, such as those made for scientific purposes, as well as pleasure-boats. There must not be two laws for the same purpose. The affairs of the sea are of such importance in a country which has been endowed by nature with an extensive and accessible coast, that I may be permitted to enlarge the debate a little and speak of other co-relative questions. The markets overseas belong to those who are best organised. It is necessary, then, that we should be superiorly equipped. Regular lines of maritime navigation are the necessary complements of railway lines and of interior navigation. They facilitate the establishment of national warehouses in foreign countries; they almost invariably create agencies. To whoever might doubt this, it is sufficient to point out that the armaments of England and Germany have been one of the principal factors of the industrial and commercial growth of these nations, and that in countries less populous than ours—such as Denmark and Norway—economic life is assured, thanks to a merchant flotilla which becomes unceasingly larger.

"To point out the way to available capital, too cautious up to the present, the Government has subscribed a large part of the capital of various navigation companies. That is an opportune

intervention which I am happy to applaud; but the creation of large armaments is confronted by very serious difficulties. Competitors have preceded us on the ground of battle. They have experience, and the power which success gives. They have seized nearly all the positions, and they are even installed in our own country. It is only progressively, by stages, at the price of incessant labour and perhaps at great sacrifice, that we can arrive at capturing a part of the international traffic which ought to be as large as our economic power.

"By reason of our fine ports, by our geographical situation alone, our armaments enter into the battle wherever it is hottest. They must commence in the middle of competition, where very powerful companies rival each other to offer to the maritime movement facilities becoming daily greater. We can therefore only intervene with some chance of success by commencing with a personnel and material which can rival the best existing. Still, this is not enough. That which is essential is the special aptitude, value, and the practical sense of those who direct these affairs. I have had an opportunity of estimating personally these superior qualities amongst the men who are at Liverpool and at London at the head of powerful armaments. One of these, Mr. Norman Hill, one of the most competent experts of England,

said in reply to me: 'It must never be forgotten that more than in any other enterprise, maritime armaments have need of capable men.'

"There is, Gentlemen, a whole capital of methods of experience to acquire, and that will demand much labour and sacrifice on the part of those who clear the way. But the Belgians have never allowed themselves to be rebuffed for want of effort. They have energy, and that essential quality, tenacity. Belgian industry can fight in all the markets of the world. We have engineers, men of commerce, and workmen of most superior quality. Cannot we also legitimately hope that an industry like that of maritime armaments will grow vigorously amongst us? If capitalists have held themselves apart up to the present it is because, amongst other reasons, the legal system of credit left much to be desired. By the qualities which we have proved we possess in other domains, we could create for our working population remunerative labour in building up this industry, not only those sailing under our flag alone, but those of foreigners who come in such large numbers to our ports and aliment them. Lighterage so important to our own country would not be, moreover, the least to furnish its contingent to the work of our ship-builders. Alongside of these essential objects, the mercantile marine and its

complementary industry, naval construction, it cannot be lost sight of that in maritime affairs professional education is of primary importance. At our epoch, knowledge, which is at the base of all industrial progress, has the character of a social necessity. In the great maritime countries, the technical education of future officers, even the recruitment of common sailors, has always been a vivid preoccupation of the Government, ship-owning companies, and also of public opinion.

"A sensation has been created amongst us at the situation in which we find ourselves from the point of view of the training of officers of the Marine. We have, it is true, two schools of navigation, one at Antwerp, the other at Ostend, but theoretical instruction, good though it may be, is not sufficient. Practical instruction is necessary, which obviously can only be given at sea. Men devoted to Belgian interests conceived the object of creating a floating school. The idea was generous and courageous—we must render homage to it. If the results have not responded to our hopes, it is not less true that the attention of the public has been drawn to a question of the greatest interest. The present situation cannot be worse—it must be remedied. In order not to weaken a good beginning which drew a portion of our youth towards a maritime career, the work of the floating school should be broadly conceived,

one to which the Government would give, moreover, a national character. But our task is not limited to the consideration only of the future of the personnel of the Marine. Belgium, which honours itself in having a social legislation protecting the working classes, has a duty to perform towards our sailors. Attention has been drawn to the danger of excessive loading which have already caused certain accidents. Is not a reform necessary to protect the lives of the crew ? In England and in Germany there are rules fixing the limit of cargo. It would be a great advance if, in the whole of the project that we are discussing, there might be included an international understanding to establish common legislation. I permit myself also to draw the attention of the Government to the urgent reform of the Pension and Assistance Fund for sailors. This excellent institution has need of being revised and completed.

"I would like to say another word regarding sea-fishing. Those interesting labourers must be encouraged, and the fishing industry must be supported. The example of most maritime countries shows that this activity is susceptible of great development. The figures are significant. While at Ostend the value of the products of the Minique rose in the period from 1895 to 1905 from frs. 3,400,000 to frs. 4,800,000, or an increase of 60 per cent. alone, at Geestemunde, in Germany, it

was 180 per cent. At Ymuiden, in Holland, it was 230 per cent. The way is clearly traced. We have valiant fishermen and an immemorial industry, but we hardly make any advance, and we remain to a large extent tributaries to our neighbours in the consumption of fish. We must resume the work, perfect it, increase our equipment, ameliorate the instruction of the fishermen, increase our clientèle, and strongly organise our commerce. We can never forget that fishing ports are a necessity, consecrated by the example of all maritime countries. Those of Hull and Grimsby in England, those of Geestemunde and of Ymuiden, serve as models. In Belgium there is no fishing port really well equipped. I regret that the fishing installations have been absolutely forgotten in the considerable works of the new port of Ostend. That industry is, notwithstanding, the principal element of commercial prosperity there.

"The project for a port of refuge at La Panne is the object of an examination on the part of the officials of Public Works. I hope that a favourable decision will be arrived at which will be acceptable to the Ministers. Besides—and this brings me back to the principal object of my discourse—in favouring an industry from which the best sailors will be recruited, we are doing work which will be useful for the extension of navigation. It is thus, Gentlemen, that the problems relative to the

prosperity of Belgium appear bound to each other, not only by the interdependence of their interests, but above all, by a unity of view which should inspire the Government and the nation. In a small country it is desirable to raise questions above the contingencies of the moment in order to prepare a future made by solid realisations appropriate to the possibilities of our people. Conscious of those responsibilities, we will thus accomplish, Gentlemen, at the same time, our duty as legislators and our duty as patriots."

This speech summed up the programme of the Prince. His public life until he came to the throne was based on that programme.

CHAPTER VIII

Prince Albert's Marriage

Early in the spring of the year 1900 Belgian papers published rumours of the coming marriage of Prince Albert with a Princess of the House of Bavaria. The news became official in the month of June when the *Belgian Monitor* announced the engagement of His Royal Highness Prince Albert of Belgium with Her Royal Highness the Princess Elisabeth, Duchess in Bavaria. Princess Elisabeth was born at Possenhofen, on July 25th, 1876, and was the second daughter of Prince Charles Theodor, Chief of the Ducal House of Bavaria, and the Princess Mary of Braganza. Recalling the impressions of the time, M. Dumont-Wilden truly says: The Prince's marriage increased the sympathy already felt for him. It was a marriage of bourgeois romance, a marriage of love, as much as one of convenience, which united the heir to the throne of Belgium with a young Princess of the most noble blood of Bavaria. The Belgian newspapers of the day recount with feeling the rustic and homely life followed at Possenhofen by the amiable Elisabeth, Duchess in Bavaria, daughter

of a learned father—for the father of the future Queen of the Belgians had taken his degrees and practised medicine. The people rejoiced over the young bride who had entered the Belgian family, and the sweetness of her smile, the simplicity of her manners, the delicacy of her simple charity, conquered the people from the very first.

Duke Carl Theodor, father of the Queen of the Belgians, head of the ducal line of Bavaria, was himself born at Possenhofen in 1830. He was the second son of the Duke Maximilian of the line of Zweibrucken-Brickenfeld, and was the brother of the late Empress of Austria. Although he held the rank of a general in the Bavarian army, he was more inclined to the science of medicine than to the art of war. He followed his studies and received his medical degree at the University of Munich, and it was such an extraordinary thing for a Prince of the Royal House to practise a profession, that it was necessary for him to receive a special edict from the Empire authorising him to do so. This was granted him in 1880. He specialised as an occulist, and the very year of his daughter's marriage he published a learned work on optics. During the summer the Duke Carl Theodor and his family lived alternately at Meran and Tegernsee. The life of his family was simple, all its members were devoted to good works, and made many friends amongst the poor. One of the brothers of the new Queen was a priest working

as a curate in a poor parish. Simply though they lived in private, when occasion called for it the Bavarian family, as well as the Flanders of Belgium, could put aside simplicity and assume all the state and pomp of royalty.

The marriage of Prince Albert was solemnised with all due pomp. It took place at Munich on Tuesday, October the 2nd. The day chosen for it was that of the national feast, when even in ordinary times there is an influx of people into the Bavarian capital, who encumber the streets and crowd the taverns, pressing to the place where the fair is held and public rejoicings take place. On the Sunday preceding the marriage it was the patronal feast of the King of Bavaria, when the national flag was hung out on the public buildings, and Te Deums sung in the cathedrals. On the day preceding the marriage there were gala dinners at the Court and popular feasts. It was then the people of Munich saw for the first time the future husband of their Princess. The Belgian papers of the day describe how on Monday evening there was a popular feast before the Palace of the Duke Carl Theodor. This *Polterabend*, or Betrothal Feast, had a delightful stamp of originality. At 8.30 the choral societies of Munich—thirty in all—massed themselves before the Palace in a reserved place surrounded by soldiers, who held back an immense crowd. All the singers held lighted torches, and a military band accompanied them.

They sang a hymn of Beethoven's, and as the first strains rang out the balcony of the palace was illuminated, and there appeared on it the *fiancés*, alone. The Duchess Elisabeth is described as being of most gracious appearance; of middle height, she seemed almost small alongside the tall Prince, her features regular and profile determined; and as she turned towards the Prince she seemed both coquettish and serious. For an instant she took off her magnificent ermine mantle, and appeared in a silk robe embroidered with large bouquets in white silk. Her figure, says the chronicler, is delicate, and although she appears fragile, she must enjoy good health for her cheeks are vividly coloured. Her chestnut hair was crowned by a superb diadem of diamonds. The Prince was in the uniform of his Grenadier Regiment, wearing the cordon of St. Hubert which the Regent of Bavaria had just bestowed on him. After the songs the delegate of the societies harangued the princely couple. As he spoke the balcony was filled with royalties. There was the Regent of Bavaria, brimming over with life and humour; the Duke Carl Theodor, the Princess's father, with the heavy brows of a student and thinker; the Count of Flanders, Prince Albert's father, and the Countess, his mother, a tall and noble pair, beaming with joy and pride on their stalwart son and his charming bride, and his sister Princess Josephine, a tall, golden-haired, graceful maiden. Next came one with a melancholy

profile, with grey beard and the eyes of a thinker—it was the King of Roumania. Then another man with beard turning grey, who alone of those assembled on the balcony was in simple evening dress—it was the Prince of Monaco.

The popular orator terminated his speech by talking of the love of the people of Bavaria for the Royal House, and referred to the charitable works of the Princess Elisabeth. "May our dear princely child who is quitting the place where her infancy has been passed, love her new country with unbounded affection; but may she not forget the leaves of our forests, the verdure of our mountains, our May days, and the fidelity of our hearts."

One whispers still in Belgium that the Bavarians remain in their hearts still faithful to this dear Princess, and the citizens of Brussels tell each other that the Bavarian soldiers in their midst have more than once revolted, and have been led into battle against them with the greatest difficulty. Although the politics of the Empire have made the Bavarians enemies for the moment of Belgium, it is admitted by all that few of the crimes alleged to have been committed by the German soldiers in the war can be laid at the door of the Bavarians. The Brussels citizens owe their immunity from insult and annoyance, other than those inevitable at such a time, to the fact that the garrison of their city is largely composed of Bavarians.

To return from the sad present to the happier past, the chronicler of that time again tells how the whole population—countryman and citizen—crowded to see the marriage. It was at the Royal Palace that the guests assembled, entering between files of archers in the costume of bygone days.

The civil marriage was celebrated in the Throne Room of the Palace. When the formalities had been completed, Baron Crailsheim, Chamberlain and Privy Councillor, and Minister for Foreign Affairs, pronounced the discourse in which he told of the ancient relations between Bavaria and Belgium, which it may be well to recall again to-day.

"This is not the first time," he said, "that personal relations have been established between the house of Bavaria and Belgium. The first lasted almost a hundred years in the Low Countries, which then included both Belgium and Holland. During the following century it was a question of the cession of the Low Countries to the House of Wittelsbach. In the ballads of the Dutch people there is still recalled the memory of the unfortunate but chivalrous and heroic Jacquelin de Bavière, who could say with pride: 'It is innate in me to make provision for the good of my people and for the defence of my towns.' At Liège, in a hospital founded by the Duke Ernest of Bavaria, Bishop of that town, appears still the name of the House of Bavaria. The memories of the

illustrious Max Emanuel who commanded as Governor-General of the Low Countries are imperishable. He merited well of these countries, which suffered such bitter trials. He came to their aid with all his resources and all his capacity. He devoted himself to the re-creation of their commerce and industries, not hesitating at the greatest sacrifices. He used the resources of his native country to cause to disappear from Brussels the ravages which that unfortunate city had sustained in its war with France."

From the Throne Room the cortège passed to the Chapel of the Court, where the religious ceremony was performed. The nuptial mass being sung, and the Benediction pronounced, the Archbishop in his turn addressed the newly-wedded pair. He, too, spoke of the union of hearts between Bavaria and Belgium. "To-day," he said, "the hearts of the Bavarian people beat in unison with those of the Belgian people."

On October 5th the newly-wedded pair arrived at Brussels. It was two o'clock in the afternoon when they descended from the train at the station in the Place Rogier. Its decorations were such as one imagines will not be seen for a long time to come, if ever again, in Brussels. From the forests of masts which had been erected around it there floated side by side the flags of Belgium, Bavaria, France, and Germany. The good people of Brussels have

ever loved a show. Their hearts went out most warmly to the young Princess; the welcome they gave her was spontaneous.

At the railway station the Princess descended first from the carriage, and was received by the King of the Belgians, the other Royalties, and the high officials of the State and the city. The Burgomaster of Brussels harangued the Prince and Princess in the usual set terms, and in the usual manner the reply was made to them.

The procession from the railway station to the Palace was through an immense crowd, partly composed of sightseers, but mainly of those who had come to give a welcome to the newly-married couple. Flowers were flung from balconies and strewn under the horses' feet, and all went merry as a marriage bell. The Socialists at that moment were making themselves heard with their usual accustomed vigour, and it was anticipated that they would attempt some sort of demonstration. Those among the timid, who knew their fellow-citizens least, feared the Socialists might disturb the harmony of the day by some overt act as dreadful as that tried some years after in Spain; but under the rule of the Coburgs such things have never happened in Belgium. One demonstration there was, at the very moment at which the Royalties descended from their carriages at the Palace. The royal cortège was followed by a group of journalists on foot, and as it passed through

the streets some of the journalists picked up the bouquets of flowers which were flung to the Princess's carriage on the way. These the journalists, seizing the excuse, advanced and presented to the Princess as she alighted. She accepted them, bowing graciously. At this moment one of the journalistic crowd thought it opportune to raise the Socialist cry of the day: "Vive l'amnestie." All regarded him, King Leopold stared with astonishment, while Prince Albert bowed, saluting gravely. The incident was not without significance.

CHAPTER IX

The Prince and the Fisherfolk

Love of the sea, combined with a desire for change of air and healthy surroundings for their children, led Prince and Princess Albert to choose Ostend as one of the places in which to spend part of their holidays. Both the Prince and Princess were always lovers, and, so far as their station allowed, followers of the simple life. To them the Dunes, swept by winter winds laden with sea spray were an attraction rather than a horror, and winter storms, as well as summer sunshine, found them on them.

There are seventy kilomètres of Dunes lashed by the North Sea on the Belgian seaboard. These form the outworks of the Belgian kingdom. In part, the kingdom has been created from them, for far behind them lies land over which even in historic times the sea ebbed and flowed unchecked. In prehistoric, but still recent times, the Dunes were created by the unaided forces of Nature—the wind fashioned them—the flux of the waves themselves aided in their construction. Later, when the population of Belgium

grew proportionately immense, man, avid of fresh fields, aided in their construction. From the very earliest times along the Dunes Belgium drew on sources of great riches. Belgian fishing, one of the earliest industries of the inhabitants of Belgium, remains the most typical and the least spoiled. The hardiest of all the sons of Belgium are her fisherfolk. It is no wonder that the brave, nature-loving Prince was drawn towards them, and became an admirer of their lives and a determined worker for the improvement of their lot.

There are in all sixteen watering places on the Belgian seaboard. Of these, Ostend is the largest—all the travelling and fashionable world knows it. Yet of the thousands who go there yearly, who rejoice in its Casino and admire the royal châlet—a building the most ancient portion of which was a present from Queen Victoria to the King of the Belgians—few have ever noticed or heard of the modest villa in which Prince Albert and his family passed many happy days before his accession to the throne. In this Villa Osterrieth the Prince lived a life free from all trammels of etiquette and entirely devoid of ostentation. Those few trippers who got up with the milkman and went forth on the *plage*, in search, it may be, of the early worm, must, in the days I write of, often have seen a young man passing rapidly along, noticeable by his tall figure—wonderful to Londoners and others who wrapped themselves

well against the slightest breeze, by the lightness of his attire whatever the weather—and the swiftness of the stride. This was Prince Albert going, as often as not alone, to visit his fisher friends.

Notwithstanding the encroachments of civilisation, the building of docks for pleasure yachts, the construction of quays and piers, the ancient population of sailors and fishermen has held its own along the whole length of the Belgian seaboard. It is, says the Belgian author who writes under the pseudonym of Jean d'Ardenne, because it is impossible to root from the soil a natural product which clings to it by roots too deep. Every season the moving population flows on to the coast, and every season it ebbs away from it as the sea does from its shores, but the old fauna, resisting all encroachments, has remained rooted to the soil.

The fisherfolk live in those cabins which artists love —little one-storied houses with wide dormer windows and green jalousies and red roofs, often covered with creepers—amongst them here and there the sails of a windmill. Their houses form a long line along the Dunes towards the interior, or nestle among the Dunes themselves, in the midst of gardens filled with sunflowers and climbing roses.

Many of the fishing communities retain their primitive habits. At Ostend the Corporation of Fishermen is subject to the rules of the great fishing ports. Those of Blankenberghe are also subject to

rules, since a dock has been constructed for their fishing smacks, which before were beached anywhere on the strand. Fishermen of Heyst preserve the unchanged manners of their ancestors, the Menapiens. The bathers' beach is forbidden to them during the season, and their boats are anchored a little further off, where, on the days they do not put to sea, they form an imposing line. When they are about to sail the fishermen wade out, their trousers tucked up and boots in hand, to the boats, which are already straining at their anchors in the rising tide. Their going with sails set, full speed before the wind, is picturesque; their return on the tide, laden with fish, and the unloading of their hauls into primitive panniers and the carrying of it to the market, is equally picturesque as at other fishing stations are the goings and comings of the crab-fishers and the sardine-fishers. They are rough men, bronzed by the sun, hardened by the wind, their eyes turned always towards the deep—despisers of firm land.

At La Panne they have small graceful boats which they still beach on the strand. They hang their nets out to dry along the hedgerows. At Coxyde the landing is done by rough lads mounted on old hacks who are trained to confront the waves.

The artist and the poet have long raved over the lives of the fishermen. Prince Albert saw its beauty, but he has been more than a looker-on at their lives,

for many a time he shared the perils they encountered in their little boats, and often sat in their houses listening to their tales and inquiring into their lives. They live contented lives, but poor ones—always on the verge of starvation.

The actual fishing population of the country seems small until one takes the size of the seaboard into calculation. It is not more than about 5,000 men and boys, but there are at least as many women directly occupied in various ways in connection with the fishing industry. About half of the fishing population lives in Ostend. There their fishing grounds are about ten miles from the coast, but the smaller boats do not venture more than three miles out. French, English and Dutch fishermen fish in Belgian waters as well as natives. Their intake of fish amounts to about 12,000,000 kilograms a year. Of this 8,000,000 kilograms remain in Belgium, and it is notable that of the fish taken off the Belgian coast and exported to other countries, Germany had the largest share—nearly 1,000,000 kilograms.

CHAPTER X

The Exhibition Year

In 1910, the year after the King's accession, which great event is described in the first chapter of this work, there was opened in the Bois de la Cambre at Brussels a Universal Exhibition, from which much was hoped by the citizens of Brussels, and by which they gained much, notwithstanding the disastrous fire which burned down a great part of its buildings and treasures, including the English section. It was opened on Saturday, April 23rd. The great question throughout the previous day was—Will the Exhibition be ready ?—a question that has been asked on the eve of the opening of every exhibition, and the answer has invariably been the same—Not a quarter of it is ready! The Belgians admitted that the portion which was the least forward was that of their own country. On the opening day the only Belgian portion fully organised was that of the Mint. In the French section the Hall of Honour was complete, but the rest was incomplete. The Italian section was neither complete within nor without. Some smaller countries, such as Denmark, had their

section ready, but of the larger countries the two that stood out as having their magnificent exhibits fully displayed and well arranged were England and Germany. Remarking on this, the Belgian Press said that Germany was honouring Belgium in having sent exhibits which permitted all the world to admire her power of producing great effects quickly by well-organised labour.

On the morning on which the Exhibition opened the public were admitted to it by the express desire of the King. At 1.30 His Majesty himself arrived, accompanied by the Queen and attended by members of his Court. The customary official speeches were made. In his speech of thanks at the reception given to him, the King duly declared the Exhibition open. He said :

" The Exhibition which I congratulate myself on opening to-day proves to the eyes of the world the immense progress realised during three-quarters of a century by Belgium. We see a home of labour where the co-operation of genius, daring in its creations and intelligent industry, has produced marvels in all the fields of human activity. I rejoice for more than one reason at the presence of so many foreign exhibitors, and of the truly international character of the Exhibition. The foreign participation is a brilliant proof of the sentiment of esteem and friendship which Belgium, industrious and pacific, has won from all nations.

By its international character the Exhibition of 1910 has a humanitarian side, for it appears as an imposing manifestation of the pacific struggle in the fields of labour and progress where the nations tend more and more to compete with each other. It is a work of peace and fraternity in which free competition has replaced armed conflicts of former times."

At that moment, not five years ago, all the world was prosperous and peaceful, all loved each other, and all looked to Belgium as the neutral ground on which they might be sure at all times to meet in harmony.

The first of the strangers of note to visit the Exhibition was Mr. Roosevelt, then newly returned from his travels in Africa. He promised to give a lecture at the Exhibition, but his time being limited he informed the Committee that he would speak for no longer than a quarter of an hour, and would take for title of his lecture the phrase " Time is Money." The ex-President of the United States was received by King Albert with marked cordiality, and was entertained by him at the Palace. The King attended Mr. Roosevelt's lecture at the Exhibition, where the people noticed with some amusement Mr. Roosevelt, enthroned on the platform, salute the King when he entered and seated himself modestly among the audience. Mr. Roosevelt's lecture was not entitled " Time is Money " as had been arranged —he entitled it " The Duties of a Citizen."

The King of the Belgians

There have been many appreciations of Mr. Roosevelt, but there can have been none more naïve than those of the Belgians, to whom one with his manners and way of speech was an absolute novelty. They found the opening of his lecture quite in the ordinary vein. It was delivered in French. But when he commenced to speak in English he became himself, that is, according to the Belgians, a mob orator; he strode about the platform with his left hand in his pocket, waving his right in the air. Sometimes he directly addressed the King, sometimes he turned his back on him; sometimes he called his audience "gentlemen," sometimes "my friends." His success, it may be freely said, as an orator was not very great in Brussels, but he left the impression behind him of being a good fellow. One group of people took him very seriously. These were "the real friends of peace," who presented him with a solemn address begging him to turn from the evil ways of a sportsman, and denouncing him for giving his patronage to a Congress about to be held in America on the subject of glorying in the massacre of animals.

The presence of English royalties at the Exhibition was prevented by the unexpected death of King Edward VII., King Albert's cousin, whose funeral he attended. Nevertheless the Exhibition was visited by a long line of Princes. Every house in Germany sent its representative, and every other State as well, from Bulgaria to Monaco.

The Exhibition Year

The Exhibition was a huge one, but, as always happened at the Brussels Exhibitions, not only was there the Exhibition proper, covering a huge extent of ground in the Bois de la Cambre, but there was a number of subsidiary exhibitions in other parts of the town and suburbs. Every one of these was visited by the King—not only every exhibition, but every stand at every exhibition ; not only was every stand visited by him, but every exhibit on that stand was examined by him ; and not only was every exhibit examined by him, but he demanded information from their proprietors, displaying his interest and technical knowledge for their gratification. To the King, who was always avid of knowledge, these visits must have been very pleasurable and profitable. I fear that the diplomatists and others who followed in his Majesty's train did not always share his laudable zeal. Queen Elisabeth, who was nearly always by his side on those visits, was doubtless as interested as he, but long walks through gallery after gallery are fatiguing to most people, and those who followed the King pitied themselves often, and, possibly quite unnecessarily, pitied the Queen.

King Albert's duties, as he viewed them during this Exhibition year, did not end with visiting the Exhibition. Brussels, until the Germans came to it, was a centre of learning, an important place for savants from all parts of the globe. There were close on two hundred International Congresses, most

of them of great importance, held at Brussels during the year. The more important of these were honoured by the King's presence and patronage, and the members of the Congresses who attended, besides being entertained in the Hôtel de Ville by the Burgomaster and citizens, were also summoned to the Palace, and there entertained by the King.

CHAPTER XI

The Queen and the Royal Household

As has been told in the introduction to this work, "King Albert did not mount the throne alone, his family mounted it with him." No words could sum up the life of the King more truly than these. They go through life together, hand in hand, the noble King and his gracious Queen, and with them, proudly by their sides, are their delightful and admiring children.

The Belgians are a race worth dying for! Belgium is a land worth fighting for. If Albert of Belgium were alone in the world, a King without a family, no man will doubt he would fight for his people and his country as bravely as he is fighting to-day, but he has the further incentive to strengthen his arm and steel his heart. He is fighting for his wife and children! as brave a wife as lives, as adorable children as man can have.

At this moment the world thinks most of Queen Elisabeth's bravery. The manner in which she

discharged in beleaguered Antwerp what her high mind conceived to be her wifely, queenly duty, regardless of the murderous missiles flung down from out the sky by dastard German hands, has won the world's admiration, but long before occasion rose for her to show her bravery she was endeared to the Belgian poor as an angel of charity.

There are Queens who give right royally from their privy purses, there are Queens whose gracious smiles win ready homage, there are Queens whose wisdom men respect, and Queens whose poetry nations love; Elisabeth of Belgium stands out pre-eminent at once as her people's Sovereign and their most intimate sympathetic friend.

The moment she arrived in Belgium, a young wife, this Princess who is now their Queen stepped straight into the people's hearts. The unaffected simplicity of her love for the poor and the suffering, and for little children, won them at once. The Belgians are a proud people, they would have repelled patronage, disdained charity; the sympathy of the Princess, who dreamt neither of patronage or charity, but gave her friendship, most precious gift of all, was welcome to them. The Princess's manner was alike to all, she did not seek to add yet another to the numerous circles of Belgian Court society, but she performed her part with calm dignity at every great function, and the ladies of the nobility attached to her person, or admitted to her intimacy, were speedily charmed

QUEEN ELIZABETH

The Consort of King Albert with her children:

PRINCES LEOPOLD AND CHARLES THEODORE AND PRINCESS MARIE JOSÉ.

by her affability. In her, Belgian *littérateurs* found, for the first time in their memory, a Princess who studied and appreciated literature, musicians found in her not only an admirer of good music, but one who was herself a good musician.

The gift she possesses the Queen shares generously, she has shown herself as ready to play for the poor as for the King, who like herself is a lover of music. One of her earliest acts in Brussels was to carry her violin to the bedside of a sick woman, who had confessed to her that she longed to hear music, and play soothing airs to her.

From her father she learned much medical lore, and gained a practical knowledge of hygiene and nursing. This knowledge is always at the people's disposal. She has taught mothers how to nurse and care for their babies, she has established dispensaries, hospitals and convalescent homes in Brussels. Every year she sent joyous troops of children for a holiday to the sea-side. Every year she summoned her *protégés* and their proud mothers to the Palace to simple feasts; from which they went laden with good things. She has rejoiced with the people when happiness was theirs. Long before the war cloud burst she shared their sorrows and helped to alleviate their misfortunes.

In 1913 a great mining accident brought death and suffering to many houses in the Borinage. On the very day of the accident a motor-car carried a

gentle lady to the house of the stricken ones. Her words brought consolation to all before they discovered that she, who entered alone and spoke to them so simply, was the Queen. In one house a miner lay whose injured arm was badly bandaged and who was in imminent danger of blood poisoning. With none but the man's homely wife to aid her, she dressed his wounds and bandaged them, and returning speedily to Brussels she dispatched to him her own doctor whose ministrations saved his life.

A thousand such instances of the Queen's kindly actions could be cited. They are graven on the Belgians' hearts, tales of them spring ready to the Belgians' tongues. The Belgians wax eloquent when they speak of their Queen ; even those of the Flemish district who generally are slow of speech.

Strangers might think the inhabitants of those Flemish districts and of the Belgian capital an undemonstrative people. They are not so, but they demonstrate in their own good time and manner. The Bois de la Cambre at Brussels was crowded with citizens taking the air on the lovely Sunday evening in November, 1901, when the booming of cannon announced the birth of the first child of the royal couple. All counted : one, two, three, and so on until the number which marked the salute of the birth of a Princess was reached. The cannon boomed on. It was a boy, ultimate heir to the Belgian throne ! A foreigner walking amongst the groups,

save that he heard cannon firing and saw the people discussing it, could not have known that anything extraordinary had happened. Not a cheer was heard, not a voice raised. The people continued their promenade talking eagerly as they always do, but nothing more. Yet the birth of an eldest son to the heir to the throne is a great event, the effects of which reach far amongst the people. There are honours given, decorations bestowed, largesses thrown, pardons granted. In anticipation of all these, if for no other reasons, the crowd should rejoice.

The foreigner wondering at the calm, seeming unconcern of the Belgian crowd could see as he walked homewards through the streets near the Bois the blinds of many houses drawn up and groups gathered in them solemnly drinking frothing and sparkling beverages. This was rejoicing after the manner of the comfortable Brussels citizens. The event, though it was the birth of the future heir to the throne, was a family one, to be feasted in the family, but the windows were left uncurtained so that passers by seeing the rejoicing might themselves rejoice.

The event was also a national one, and it was proved that the poorest of the nation rejoiced in it, in a quaint and simple manner.

In Belgium, as in France, people do not communicate to their friends the great events of their

families, births, marriages and deaths, by way of advertisements in the newspapers. They send the intelligence to them by means of printed letters of *faire-part* inviting them to share their joy or sorrow as the case may be. In the case of the birth of a Royal Prince the bulletin posted on the palace door represents the letter of *faire-part*, the register thrown open in the palace hall for the inscription of visitors' names offers a substitute for letters of congratulation.

The bulletin of the birth of Prince Leopold was posted on the door of his parents' palace in the Rue de la Science, the register thrown open in its hall was speedily filled with long lists of names. Crowds pressed to the palace to sign it; the most illustrious jostling the most humble. Immense bags of letters of congratulations, from great folk and small, also poured in. To each and every one who offered Prince and Princess Albert their congratulations, either by the inscription of their names or by letter, there was sent the printed letter of thanks, which it is also customary to send out from every Belgian family congratulated on a baby's birth; and in many a humble home in Brussels copies of this letter are treasured to-day as pious souvenirs of a great occasion, made greater by the people's joy, and the Prince's courtesy.

Dozens of poor folks in Brussels, who had sons born to them on that great day, christened them

Leopold, after the new Prince, and told the Prince's parents they had done so. To each of these congratulations, accompanied by substantial gifts and presents of gold watches for the lucky babies, were sent.

Amongst the letters announcing the birth of babies to the poor on that same day, which reached the Palace of the Rue de la Science, there were some which announced the birth of babies just a little too soon or a little too late to be inscribed as born at the same time as the baby Prince. The writers of these letters were included amongst the recipients of the Prince's thanks, counter-congratulations and bounty.

Two other babies came to the royal pair, Prince Charles, Count of Flanders, born on October 10th, 1903; and Princess Marie José, born on August 4th, 1906. Never was greater care given to babies' nursing, or infants' teaching than to these royal children. The Palace in the Rue de la Science in Brussels, in which until his accession Prince Albert and his family lived in an airy, sunned-in building, facing a pretty park and having a large garden in its rear. Its brightest and most airy rooms were set aside as nurseries. Over them the god of hygiene held sway, invoked by the Princess, his learned devotee.

The less intelligent might smile at the precautions to safeguard her children's health taken by the Princess. She was a mother guarding her offspring which seemed fragile, one who knew much of the

laws of health and used her knowledge wisely to the full. People spoke wonderingly of special gowns put on when visits to the nursery were paid, lest malignant germs from outside be introduced, and told how grandmother Flanders' furs had to be removed, ere that august lady could enter the guarded nurseries to embrace her grandchildren.

Much of the Prince's as of the Princess's time and thought was given to the babies, their nurses and teachers were chosen by them, and all they did was vigilantly supervised. The open carriages in which the babies took the air were a familiar sight in Brussels, as, later, were the children's promenades in the public parks and avenues and woods of Brussels. The children rubbed shoulders freely with the Brussels folk, gathered flowers in the parks, stared with wonderous eyes at the glorious toys in the shop windows of Brussels, and joyously built sea-defying castles on the sands at Ostend just as other children did.

Taken everywhere by their parents to visit schools, hospitals, asylums, the homes of the poor, the training schools for soldiers' sons and sailor lads, the castles of the great, exhibitions, docks, manufactories, ships and trains, and, as they grew older, parliament and great assemblies, these royal children learned as their parents have done, to know, and be known by, love and be loved by the Belgians of every degree. Later, when he had ascended the throne and the young

Princes having grown older, the choice of companions for them became a matter of much importance, King Albert laid down the rule that the lads selected to be the comrades of his sons should be the sons of honest men who worked, not of idlers, however high their rank or great their names.

Carefully instructed, religiously educated, they early became very wise little people, but they lost none of their childish ways. Their love for their parents is very warm and very natural, their awe for the kingly office of their father is genuine and was not forced on them. They were not taught as babies to look on their parents in any other light than that of a loving father and mother. The story goes that when King Leopold died, the younger children asked who would be King, and were told by their mother it was the best and kindest man in the kingdom. "Then," said Prince Charles, "it will be M. Peeters." M. Peeters was the steward of the Countess of Flanders, a very kindly gentleman, generous in the bestowal of fruit and sweets and all good things.

The Palace in the Rue de la Science was a house rented from the Marquis d'Asche, whose furniture remained in it. It has a fine staircase and noble reception-rooms. The Prince's, and above all the Princess's taste, made it a treasure house. Here they led pleasant, studious lives—the Prince busy throughout the day over books and studies, the Princess with the myriad duties of one who

led the social and philanthropic worlds. Learning and nobility had equal entry to it. Artists were welcome there and musicians honoured. The Prince, as his duty required, was often abroad and left much of the management of their home to the Princess, who, when he was away, planned pleasant surprises for him, such as the re-furnishing of his study in a style she knew he liked.

All the charitable and all the poor knew the Palace of the Rue de la Science. The day of King Albert's accession to the throne was a great day in the lives of the poor, whose friends he and Queen Elisabeth were. They crowded the streets before his house, and pressed so thickly into the park in front, to see and cheer the new King and Queen, that when they were gone there was not a spot in the park where shrub or flower had flourished, that did not bear the impress of a thousand feet.

The King's accession did not change but widened the Queen's life; her duties and opportunities became greater. The children's health being ever a great consideration, the royal family moved as speedily as possible to the château of Laeken, in whose wide halls, spacious park and glorious gardens the little Princes and the Princess Marie-José could roam at will. There was much furnishing and decorating to be done. Leopold II. had rebuilt the palace of Laeken, ravaged by fire years before. The re-building of the palace of Brussels, carried out on a

magnificent scale under his directions, was on the point of completion when he died, but though that King had built and embellished those edifices he left them bare inside. In the arrangement of the palaces the Queen found scope for her energy and taste, and when the time came for the reception of royal guests the palace and château were as charming within as they were stately without.

Besides the intimate receptions at the Court there are every season in Brussels a long series of State dinners to which the leading members of the nobility, and all the official world—from the Presidents of the Senate and Chamber, and the members of the Cabinet, down to the Bourgmestres of the suburbs and the officers of the civic guards—are bidden; two State balls; and a garden party at Laeken. At all these functions the Queen played her part most gratefully. Her love of music, art, and literature, her knowledge of science and of social questions, and her philanthropic zeal, give her subjects of interest in common with every guest she entertains. The most notable change in the routine of the palace life in Brussels, introduced by Queen Elisabeth, was the welcoming to it of *littérateurs* and artists. By Queen and King the poet Verhaeren is specially admired and honoured. He has often been their guest at intimate parties at Les Amerois.

Foreign guests became frequent in Brussels on the new accession. Foreign royalties again flocked there

Both King and Queen have many near relations, old and young. These came gladly to Brussels and Laeken, paying visits in that incognito which frees royalty from the trammels of State. There came also many other foreigners of lesser rank, nobles, explorers, scientists and politicians, chiefs of industry, and leaders of the commercial world. The visits of the Lord Mayors and Sheriffs of London were so frequent as to be almost an annual fixture.

Before others saw a cloud on the horizon, the Queen as well as the King knew war was inevitable, but like the King she acted her part to the last, and let no tremor of fear or anxiety appear. She remained in Brussels, living her accustomed life, until the approach of the Germans compelled her to take her children for safety to Antwerp. In Antwerp the life of the Court went on, with the usual routine of State receptions and visits to public places, churches, schools and hospitals. The Red Cross work, at the head of which the Queen placed herself with her usual zeal, although undertaken in a new cause, was no new work for her.

With calm courage, Queen Elisabeth faced the enemies' projectiles and their bombs dropped from aeroplanes and Zeppelins at Antwerp. She left her husband's side there only for as long as was necessary to bring their children in safety to England, returning to Antwerp to remain with the King amongst its defenders until the last moment of the siege.

From Antwerp the Court moved to Ostend, where the Queen busied herself with Red Cross work, and attention to the soldiers' needs. She was the last to leave Ostend. From there she went again with her husband to the front in France. In his dispatch from Northern France Mr. G. Ward Price, of the *Daily Mail*, describes All Saints' Day of 1914.

"It is All Saints' Day; the time 7.30 in the morning; the scene a narrow lane between the sand-dunes by the side of a little brick church.

"The lane was quite empty, when round the corner came a solitary couple walking side by side.

"It was the King of the Belgians and his Queen walking to early Mass at the little church. Thirty yards behind them followed a single officer, but except for that a stranger would have detected no more of the artificial signs of kingship in the pair than that the husband was unusually young for a general.

"Without speaking they came along the sandy lane, and as they drew nearer there could be seen in their faces the expression of a noble sorrow. For All Saints' Day is the vigil of All Souls', and Belgium has never known so sad an All Souls' Day as to-morrow will be. Not a family but will weep to-morrow for some soldier who has fallen during those deadly months of summer."

Yes! but not a family that did not then, and does not now, rejoice that the good Queen Elisabeth is safe and sound by her brave husband's side, aiding him in his great fight for his crown and his country's freedom.

CHAPTER XII

The Visit of the German Emperor to Belgium

The first State visit that King Albert and Queen Elisabeth made after coming to the throne was made to Berlin. The visit was paid in May, 1910. There were the usual reviews and receptions and dinners, but the Emperor suffering slightly was absent from them, his place being filled by the Crown Prince. At the State dinner which was given to the Belgian Sovereigns, the Crown Prince, speaking in his father's name, assured King Albert of the amicable sentiments of the German Government and people for the Belgian Sovereigns and their flourishing country; sentiments, he added, which the Emperor would take the greatest care to fortify. These amicable sentiments had found their expression in the courteous participation of Germany in the pacific competition between the nations united at this moment in the splendid capital of His Majesty. These sentiments have also found consummation in the satisfaction felt by both sides in the surmounting

of the difficulties which exist regarding the frontier of West Africa and the Congo.

To these sentiments of peaceful friendship King Albert gave a fitting and sincere reply.

The return visit of the German Emperor was paid to Brussels in October, 1910. Never were foreign monarchs received more cordially by King and people than were the German Emperor, the Empress, and the Princess Victoria in Brussels. The whole city was *en fête*, the German flag floated everywhere —not alone, as it does to-day, but side by side with the Belgian colours which the Germans have now torn down—and everywhere there were cheering crowds. The courtesy and imperial majesty of the Kaiser, the graciousness and affability of the Kaiserin, the charms of the Princess, were lauded by all. Everything was done to display the great resources of Belgium—her art treasures, her mineral wealth, her commercial greatness, her army, her literature—all were displayed by King Albert, a courteous and attentive host to his guests. The King took care that the Kaiser should meet all the leading men of the Kingdom, and it was specially noticed that at the gala representation at the Opera House, where members of all parties were present, the King himself sought out and presented to the Kaiser the leaders of the Liberal party, whom party considerations had prevented attending the dinners at more intimate receptions of the Court. For Brussels, what

were considered to be enormous prices, were paid for windows from which to view the procession of Imperial guests. At the Hôtel de Ville the Kaiser was received by M. Max, the Burgomaster, now the Emperor's prisoner in a distant fortress. Receiving his Imperial guest, the Burgomaster said to him, in thanking him for the honour paid in visiting the Hôtel de Ville, the common home of all the citizens :

> " Your Imperial Majesty, the august personification of the people, lover of art and of beauty, you manifest by your visit your interest in an edifice that our intense patriotism considers one of the most precious jewels of architecture that our ancestors have left us."

The Emperor replied, thanking the Burgomaster for his amiable words, and for the magnificent reception given to them " in this illustrious edifice, the jewel of architecture, and a treasury of historical souvenirs— "

> " I am happy to salute the town of Brussels, the centre of a country which is distinguished by the serious and laborious spirit of its inhabitants. An admirer of the brilliant results obtained from all time by the Belgian nation in the domains of industry and commerce, I congratulate it with all my heart on the triumph it has won in the recent Exhibition."

At the State dinner at which the feasts of the

visit culminated, King Albert proposed the usual toast of the German Emperor, in whose visit, he said, Belgium found a fresh proof of the affection of Germany for their nation.

"Sire," said King Albert, "the Belgian people appreciate fully the amiable interest shown by your Imperial Majesty, and they salute the Emperor and Monarch so far-seeing and enlightened, who is known so well to favour the brilliant growth of his country in all the domains of human activity. He desires not less sincerely that relations of the most complete confidence should exist between the two reigning houses which shall fortify the friendships of the two nations.

"As for myself, united to your Imperial Majesty by blood relationship as well as by affection, as you were pleased to recall to me at Potsdam, I know the worth of the sentiments that you express to the Queen and to me, and I desire to say that we are deeply grateful for them. I am happy to take the opportunity of expressing to your Imperial Majesty the warmest wishes for your happiness and for the glorious and prosperous continuance of your reign, and that your noble efforts will continue to preserve the peace of the world and thus benefit all nations."

The Emperor replied, speaking seemingly from his heart. Those present took special note of the fact

that he spoke in German. After the customary complimentary phrases, he said:

"The brilliant reception which has been prepared for us by your Majesties and the Belgian people in this splendid capital has profoundly touched us, and awakened sentiments of gratitude all the stronger because we find in this reception a subject of close union which exists not only between our families but also between our two peoples.

"Full of amiable sympathy, I, in common with all Germany, observe the surprising success which the Belgian people has won in all the domains of commerce and industry by its indefatigable activity, the crowning of which we have been able to salute in the Universal Exhibition, which was so brilliantly and successfully held this year. The whole earth is enveloped by the world-wide commerce of Belgium. In that there is a field of pacific action in which Belgians and Germans meet everywhere. Equal admiration fills us for the culture of the beautiful, a domain in which the artists and poets of Belgium have acquired such a marked place. May the relations full of confidence and neighbourliness of which the recent negotiations between our two Governments have given such amicable testimony be still more strengthened. May the reign of your Majesty spread happiness and prosperity amongst your royal house and among your people. This is the most profound wish of my

heart, with which I cry long live their Majesties the King and Queen of the Belgians. Hoch ! "

The Belgian people have not forgotten, and they have done their best to prevent the Germans now amongst them from forgetting these words. When the Germans entered Brussels, as conquerers of a moment, the Belgians hope, they found the walls of the Belgian capital plastered with placards bearing a copy of the German Emperor's speech. The Germans do not seem to be particularly proud of it, for almost immediately after their arrival all the copies of the speech disappeared from sight.

M. Max, Burgomaster of Brussels, who entertained his Imperial Majesty with the splendid hospitality of the Belgian capital, must often recall in his German prison the gracious words of the Emperor praising the magnificent and venerable Hôtel de Ville, the beauty of which he admired so much, and which the citizens of Brussels believe they have certain knowledge the German Emperor's soldiers have undermined, with the intention of blowing it up on the first moment of the reappearance of victorious Belgian troops and those of their Allies at the gates of Brussels, when they force the Germans to retire.

The Brussels people were completely hoodwinked by the German Emperor's gracious speeches. The efforts they made to make his visit pleasant, and to prevent anything untoward happening were stupendous. There were many people in Brussels then who

distrusted and as many who hated the Germans—there were Belgian anarchists and Socialists with hatred of Imperial Germany boiling in their veins, but those who were so ready when occasion arose to cry out against their King, sooner than damage their country's material interests, or do anything that might endanger the peaceful relations between the great Empire and the State they loved, held their peace, and absented themselves from all places through which the Emperor passed.

The German visitors did all they could to check the enthusiasm of the German colony in Brussels. The Germans established in Brussels were undoubtedly nearly all of them there for political as well as commercial or social ends, but their loyalty to their Emperor, or possibly their desire for advancement in the Imperial service, or for the winning of German decorations, led them to give a display of the importance of their establishments which the Emperor wisely considered inopportune. He could not refuse to receive deputations from the German colonies, the Chambers of Commerce and the like, nor could the German Empress refuse to visit the German charitable institutions. The great German school of Brussels, which rivalled the greatest Belgian school of that city, had also to be visited, but the visits were paid as unostentatiously as possible, and everything that could be done was done to prevail on the Germans to cry "Vive" instead of "Hoch."

One State visit was paid which the Brussels folk now look on as almost as historic as that to the Hôtel de Ville—it was that to the palace of his Serene Highness the Duke d'Arenberg. The Duke d'Arenberg is a mediatised German Prince, whose forbears owned great Belgian estates, and lived for centuries in Brussels, where their palace, inherited with the estates by the present Duke, is as magnificent as any of the Belgian royal palaces. The Arenbergs never accepted Belgian citizenship, nor condescended to bear Belgian titles. They have mixed with the Belgian royalties only on terms of courteous equality. They were the centre in Brussels of a social circle as brilliant as that of the Court, much more exclusive, and formed by bearers of more ancient titles than the majority of those who surround the Belgian King. Most of their friends and associates were descended from the families which were noble in Belgium when Belgium made part of the Austrian Empire.

The social circle of the Arenbergs was strongly Germanic in tone as everyone knew, and few thought it unfitting, but many whispered that under the roof of the Duke's palace things went on of which no loyal Belgian would approve, and it is more than certain that when the full history of the present war, of the intrigues which led up to it, and the incidents which marked its opening come to be written, it will be found that these happenings in the palace of the Arenbergs were extraordinary.

CHAPTER XIII

The King and the Politicians

When King Albert ascended the throne, the members of the Cabinet, as in duty bound, tendered their resignation to him, and he, as bound by courtesy, begged them to retain their portfolios. In these acts there was no political significance. No one could tell from them, or with certainty from anything that had gone before, what the King's politics were. The Belgian writer, M. Dumont-Wilden, in a recently-published article, has recalled the fact that "following the simplest formulæ which crowds love, it was sometimes said in Belgium that Prince Albert would be a Socialist King," which really meant that, following the tradition of some of his family, he recognised the development of democracy as a necessary fact in the evolution of modern peoples, and dreamt of conciliating it with the monarchy, element of continuity and social stability. This saying, which all parties accepted as an indication that the new King was seriously inclined to work for the people's welfare, added something to

his popularity, but threw no real light on his practical politics, for none were so wanting in intelligence as to imagine that he would call to power Socialists, sworn enemies of the Crown, of Church and of State.

On the King's accession, the Catholic party, now still in office, had already been in power for an uninterrupted period of twenty-five years. Again and again it had successfully resisted the attacks of the strong Liberal and Socialist parties united against it. Except in exceptional circumstances, general elections are not held. Members of the Chamber are elected for four years, their periods of office being so arranged that elections for each half of the Chamber, in turn, are held every two years. Elections were imminent when King Albert succeeded. The opening of the Universal Exhibition of Brussels was also at hand. The power of the Catholics was weakening. They were supposed to have lost much by the death of King Leopold, but it was little likely the Belgian electors, a cautious people, would turn the existing Government, against which no serious grievance, except that of longevity, could be raised, out of office at the time of the exhibition. All were inclined to allow each other breathing time, but angry passions were in the air, and before many years were out the King had to assert himself to preserve the interior peace of the nation.

The first unpleasantness the King was called

upon to face was Socialist insult. The Socialists had carried out a well organised, venomously executed, and quite unsuccessful attack on the Catholic Government at the elections of 1910. This was only a repetition of what had passed at every previous election since the Socialist party was formed, but their fresh failure increased the Socialist venom. The exhibition over, they determined to force the Chamber to yield to their demand for electoral reform on the basis of one man one vote, by pursuing a course of riot and disorder which, while avoiding bloodshed, would create so great an uneasiness, the Government would be compelled to surrender. They opened the campaign by a mock riot at the opening of the Parliamentary session of 1911.

At one side of the lovely park of Brussels there stands the noble palace of the Belgian Kings. Facing it at the opposite side of the park is the Parliament House, the Palais de la Nation. A broad avenue runs through the park from palace to palace, its straight line being broken only by two ponds, one of which is famous from the fact that Peter the Great terminated a famous supper in the park by jumping, clothes and all, into it. King Leopold II. used sometimes to walk through the park to open Parliament, escorted by the dignitaries of his house, but that was since mounting on horseback was avoided by the ageing monarch. King Albert follows the more common and splendid custom of riding through the

streets from palace to Parliament, with his staff on horseback, the Queen and ladies of her Court driving in State carriages.

The Socialists who lined the way made the Queen's procession at the opening of the Parliament in 1911, a sort of burlesque of that last gruesome journey of the French royalties from Versailles to Paris. Instead of loaves of bread on pikes there were scraps of paper on staves bearing inscriptions demanding universal suffrage, instead of gory heads there was everywhere the blood-red eglantine, the Socialist's badge; men and women shrieked and danced and waved their mock weapons in the air as the Queen's cortège passed by. They showered their scraps of paper at the Queen's carriage, but the Queen never flinched. Showers of the scraps of paper fell upon her lap, but she would not permit the windows of her carriage to be raised, and the little Princes who sat with her amused themselves collecting the papers. The mock riot grew worse when the King appeared; the showers of paper flung at his charger made the brave steed prance and rear, so that the King had to exert all his skilful horsemanship to keep his seat.

In the Chamber itself, as ever when the King is present, all was magnificent. The floor of the House was crowded by senators and deputies; the dignitaries of the Court attended the Queen, the King's mother, and the Royal Princes. The galleries were full of

men, in uniform or full dress, and well-gowned ladies. The Socialist deputies created an immense uproar, but they were unable to spoil the decorum of the scene, or mar the majesty of the King's presence and address. Their action served royalty more than it served themselves. When their shrieking was at its height a man of the people in the public gallery cried out in Flemish, "Long live the Queen!" Frothing with rage, the Socialists hissed and roared, but their cries were drowned in the storm of cheers and vivats the loyal cry evoked. Their yelling at the King called forth fresh outbursts of loyal expressions and left the King unmoved. In the midst of the uproar, Emile Vandervelde, the Socialist leader, was seen to shake his clenched fist in the King's face and yell something most observers thought a menace. It was no menace at royalty. It was, "We have nothing against the King; it is the Government we attack." The words were significant. Vandervelde is to-day a Belgian Minister of State.

The Socialists ceased their clamour after a time, and the King read his speech swiftly, in a clear determined voice, and swiftly passed out. He wore the traditional uniform of the Belgian Kings—a general's full dress such as King Leopold I., founder of the dynasty, wore, but those who draw indications of policy from gestures, noticed he did not place his cocked hat on his head as his predecessors had done when addressing Parliament, and as he himself had

done at first. This they declared was a deliberate action, meant to indicate that the Court was democratic.

The Belgian Court is neither democratic or anti-democratic. Assuredly it bowed in no way before Demos that day. Throughout the proceedings the Queen sat gravely observing everything, listening to the smiling whispers of the Countess of Flanders, replying briefly to the questions of her sons.

"Mother," said the younger of the Princes, looking at a vociferating Socialist, "that gentleman is crying out very loudly. He seems very angry!"

"Yes," said the Queen, "he is calling out very loudly, and is very angry, because he is not given something he wishes for. You cry out sometimes, too, when you are not given something you wish for that is not good for you."

"But," said the Prince, "when I get angry and cry out for anything I am never given it, but I am punished."

"Yes," said the Queen in a quiet tone her son knew, and the little Prince continued to gaze at the yelling Socialist, and draw his own conclusions from the scene.

This mock riot was a prelude of what was to come.

Another parliamentary battle took place in 1912. This time the Socialists and Liberals were united

more closely than ever against the Catholic Government. Again they were defeated. After the elections the alliance between the Liberals and Socialists was broken. The Socialists dropped for a moment the attack on religious education, which was the only subject on which they and the Liberals could completely unite, and raised instead that of universal suffrage. The most violent amongst them went farther and cried, "Down with the Crown; Vive la Republique." On June 3rd, 1912, the day after the elections, when the renewed defeat of the opponents of the Catholic party was known, a serious riot took place at Liège, where the mob, issuing forth from the Socialist headquarters, raised the cry of the Republic, sacked Catholic clubs and newspaper offices, tore down and burned the national flag, and fired from the Socialist café on the gendarmes, who fired on them in return, killing some people within the café. This riot was followed by a demonstration at Seraing, where 20,000 Socialists marched through the streets, singing the Internationale and repeating the cry of "Vive la Republique." For a moment it seemed as if a rising was imminent. The excitement spread beyond the frontier. Thousands of Belgian Socialists crossed the frontier, from Quiverain into France, and invited the miners at Blanc-Misseron to join with them in a general strike. The French miners promised to do so, and an immediate, unorganised strike was avoided only by the

urgent entreaties of the Socialist leaders, Vandervelde and de Broukere, who rushed around the country in Monsieur Vandervelde's motor-car, imploring their followers not to act precipitately, but to wait the meeting of a congress of the party where their future action could be decided upon and arrangements made for its organisation.

The promised Congress was held in the end of June. The chief leaders of the Socialist party, some of them men of wealth and education, all of them men of means, were opposed to a general strike, but their councils of moderation were overborne by the cries of the mass, led by Monsieur Anslée, Deputy for Ghent, and urged on by the secret hinting of the anarchists amongst them, whose leader, Emile Chapelier, is one of the most intelligent, if fanatic, of the men of the people in Belgium.

The strike, once decided upon, was well organised. This time it was the Socialists against the world. The rich Liberals, fearing for their money-bags, and the Liberals of the poorer classes, traders and small shopkeepers, fearing bankruptcy and starvation from the cessation of commerce, sided with the Catholics in determination to resist them. The Socialists cared nothing for this. They boasted they had 125,000 men enrolled as members of their trade unions, and three times as many more prepared to strike with the comrades. Their funds were large. Their war chests were filled by subscriptions swept

in from home and abroad—from Socialist comrades, from political adventurers, in one instance from a millionaire Liberal adversary of the Government. On the eve of the strike, one of the organisers stated that the Socialist party had in cash £50,000—more than enough to sustain a strike for close on a year, far more than was necessary, for it was calculated that five weeks' strike would bring employers to the verge of ruin, and the Government to its knees.

"Those who are going to strike," said this party leader, "are not paupers; they have savings, and are ready to use them for the cause."

The great strike took place in April. It never became a general one, but it caused a dislocation of trade and a great loss of money to workers and employers alike. It was unattended by bloodshed. The leaders of the Socialist party claimed and were given by many credit for this, but the real credit for it was due to the Prime Minister, Baron de Broqueville, whose determined attitude and skilfully arranged display of armed force at all places where disturbances were likely, overawed the ill-intention.

In their calculation which led them to decide on striking, the Socialists made two mistakes. They forgot to take into account the fact that if their unions were well organised, the trade unions and like societies of the Catholics were as well organised and as powerful; and they thought the King was

weak, and would force his Government to yield to them.

This last mistake was the principal cause of their check. During the strike, the wildest rumours flew. It was said the King would force the Government to resign and give place to a coalition government in which Liberals and Socialists would be included. The name of the go-between of the King and the various leaders was in every man's mouth, as were the names of the future Premier and his chief colleague, both of them prominent members of the existing Government.

With an audacity born of belief that the King would yield, the Socialist and Liberal newspapers cried out for the intervention of the Crown. The strike-leaders' mistake sprang from their knowledge of the King's desire for the people's welfare, and of his approval of all actions for the people's good by whomsoever taken—Catholic, Liberal or Socialist.

They had yet to learn that King Albert was strong, not weak, and that if his ardour for the people's good was not more sincere than theirs, his knowledge and foresight was infinitely greater, and his judgment unwarped by party prejudice.

The King upheld his ministry in their wise resolution not to yield to clamour. His councils decided the issue. The slight concession of the appointment of a parliamentary commission to inquire into the question of electoral reform was given to the Socialists,

and the strikers, after many weeks of idleness, went back to work more poor and more wise.

This victory strengthened the power of the Catholic party in and out of Parliament, and paved the way for the successful passage of the Army Reform Act, which in its turn enabled Belgium to make the gallant stand against her foes she is now making.

Thus by his firmness and wise councils in the years before the war, as well as by his bravery and generalship in the field since its commencement, King Albert is the one to whom, in this world's crisis, Belgium and all civilisation owes the most.

Had King Albert not stood firm, and encouraged his ministry to stand firm, when the strike menaced Belgian industry with ruin, the Government would have been forced to yield, a party would have come into power which would not, or dare not, pass the Army Bill, and the outbreak of war would have found Belgium unprepared.

King Albert did not yield to the Socialist strikers. He had already shown that, where he thought acquiescence wrong, he could refuse his consent to the proposals of the Catholic Government, and, when he deemed it necessary, dictate to it. Monsieur Schollaert, then Prime Minister, had introduced an Education Bill into the Chamber on March 14th, 1911, which made education nominally compulsory, while proposing no other penalty for those who did not send their children to school than that of holding

them up to public obloquy. This Bill provided that parents should be given tickets, on which the masters of whatever school they sent their children to could obtain payment for the children's instruction, the parents being left the free choice of the schools to which their children went. The Liberals and Socialists opposed this Bill on the ground that clerical influence would oblige the parents to select private or semi-private clerical schools instead of State schools for their children. The Bill was blocked in Parliament, and a deadlock seemed likely, when the King—having consulted with the President of the Chamber and leaders of the Catholic party outside of the Cabinet, M. Beernaert, ex-Prime Minister, and M. Woest, both Ministers of State, or Privy Councillors, whose advice the Crown was entitled to seek—sent for M. Schollaert, and told him that in his opinion the Bill should be dropped. M. Schollaert, after a moment's hesitation, obeyed the royal injunction. He withdrew his Bill and resigned office, being succeeded by the Baron de Broqueville.

This determined action of the King caused at the time secret murmuring amongst the Catholics. It is admitted now by all it was a most happy act. M. Schollaert is an able statesman; his Bill had not the defects his opponents alleged it had—another Bill on lines not dissimilar to it was introduced and successfully carried by the new Ministry; but the Baron de Broqueville, future reorganiser of the army

and Minister for War, was the man Belgium needed as Prime Minister.

By his action with regard to the Education Bill and the general strike, King Albert's attitude towards Catholics and Socialists was clearly defined. No occasion arose for the King to help publicly or publicly restrain the Liberals. The Liberal party is a great party in the Belgian State. It has many and some glorious traditions to uphold. Charles Rogier, one of the founders of the Liberal party in Belgium, was also one of the founders of Belgian independence, and one of the greatest of Belgian statesmen. There have always been men of great learning and large intellect amongst the Liberals who did honour to their country, though, it is to be regretted, such men were not always amongst the Parliamentary representatives of the party. A moment came when the Liberal party in the Chamber represented little more than the selfish interests of the monied class, and, having ceased to advance, lost its hold on the country. The elections of 1894, when the Socialists gained their first entry into the Chamber, left them with only eighteen seats. For some years it seemed as if the Liberal party was crushed for ever, but extravagances of the Socialists in their earlier years brought back to Liberalism many who had quitted it. At present, among the leaders of the Liberal party, there are some men of great abilities, and some of vast wealth. King Albert took every opportunity which

offered itself of showing that he recognised the services performed to the State by the Liberals, and their right to have their views considered, although the chances of party warfare excluded them from office; and the moment war seemed inevitable the leaders of the Liberals in the Senate and the Chamber were summoned to the King's Council as Ministers of State.

CHAPTER XIV

The King and Germany

At the very moment of the birth of King Albert, Belgium's tranquillity was disturbed by Prussian interference; following the announcement of the Prince's birth, there is found in the *Independance Belge* of the 10th of April, 1875, a statement regarding the exchange of Notes between the German and Belgian Governments. Germany was then complaining that Belgium did not sufficiently maintain her neutrality; the German Foreign Office read Belgium the following lecture:

> "A State which enjoys the privilege of neutrality seems bound in strong measure by that fact. It has to be watchful that its territory does not become the theatre of enterprise directed against the peace of neighbouring States, or against the security of their natives. The most powerful Empires have regulated their legislature on that basis, and have completed it when necessity made itself felt."

To this lecture from Germany, Belgium replied :

"Belgium, independent and neutral, has never lost sight of her international obligations, and she will continue to fulfil them to their fullest extent. To acquit herself of this task she finds the most secure support in her institutions which issued from the entrails of her past and, appropriate to the character of the country, have sustained during half a century the trial of events, and have become the indispensable conditions of her existence."

Commenting on this, the Paris correspondent of *The Times* of that day wrote :

"It is a curious fact, which it is well to note and comment on, that the German Government recalls Belgium to her duties as a neutral State, and that M. d'Aspremont-Lynden (Belgian Foreign Minister) replies energetically that Belgium is not only neutral but is, moreover, independent. This language is at once correct and proud."

This incident, happening at the very moment of the birth of King Albert, is typical of the relations which have existed throughout His Majesty's life between the Belgian Court and Government and that of Germany. Outsiders, even in Belgium, thought that Germany's desire to profit by commercial relations with Belgium was leading the

Government of the Empire to the continual maintenance of friendly relations between the two countries. No one could have been blind in Belgium to the steady advance of German interests there, but many thought that that advance boded no harm to the peace or independence of the State. The Court and its advisers thought differently. Every advance that Germany made was regarded with suspicion. Such as were accepted were accepted with feelings of misgiving. Throughout the greater part of the reign of King Leopold, Belgium relied on English or French support in every moment of danger, and in that long reign there were many moments of danger. At the end of his reign King Leopold was supposed to be ready to accept German support against England, but whatever the King's thoughts may have been, the attitude of the Cabinet did not alter, and in preparing himself for his part as King it was to the constitutional advisers of the Crown that Prince Albert chiefly looked for guidance and instruction.

In going to Bavaria to seek a wife he went to the Court of a Catholic country which is supposed to be subject, not willingly, to the Emperor's whims. Those who instructed Prince Albert in political science and diplomacy were men little likely to be duped by German wiles. The Prince struck out boldly against German encroachments when, in his speeches in the Senate, he called on the Belgian Parliament to stimulate the ardour of the commercial

world of Belgium, and to lead it to create a mercantile marine which, joined to the splendid railway system of the country, would make Belgium independent, at least in times of peace, of the aid of any outside State.

It has always been a source of wonder that Belgian shipowners have not developed their trade. So small is Belgian shipping that it may be said even now to be almost non-existent, and yet the Belgians do not fear the sea, and their eagerness to seek fortune and fame in Africa, in Asia, and in all parts of Europe, proves they are ready to leave their homes, but all the efforts of Leopold I. and Leopold II., as well as of those of the present ruler as Prince and King, have proved unavailing. The explanation seems to lie in the fact that the Belgians are good workmen, excellent manufacturers, but bad shopkeepers. They seem to have thought, up to the present, that it is enough to have good wares to sell, and that it is not necessary to carry them afield, or to cry them in the market place. Belgium has not, up to the present, advertised her goods as she might, either by her flag on the high seas or by her announcements in the newspapers. King Leopold failed to prevail on the country to create a mercantile marine. His failure was said to be due to the fact that it was believed everywhere his real intention was to create a navy under cover of a mercantile marine. England and France are said to have united to prevent him from carrying out

this design of which the Belgian commercial world fought shy. Prince Albert when he advocated the creation of a mercantile marine was not opposed on any such grounds. The opposition which caused his plans to fail was covert, and came from Germany. The German Government, in fact, through those who served it as traders, had already laid strong hands upon Antwerp and Brussels when the Prince first raised his voice. They came in the guise of friends—merchants, bankers, and shipowners. They could not prevent themselves from boasting openly that Antwerp was already theirs, and that Brussels soon would be theirs, gained by peaceful means. The inhabitants of Antwerp have never been free from the accusation of German sympathies—rather, perhaps, it might be said, of sympathies not wholly Belgian. Germany played on the monetary interests of the commercial community to such an extent that it could not be prevailed upon to realise that free intercourse with every land by means of Belgian-owned ships was desirable, or that danger lay in allowing the banking and shipping interests of their city to be concentrated in German hands. The rivalry of Amsterdam and Rotterdam was waved before their eyes to blind them to the more dangerous rivalry of Hamburg, and whenever a chance of anti-German sentiment seemed likely to cause disaster to German designs through Antwerp on Belgium, the bogey of British jealousy, the danger threatening from

Liverpool and London, was raised by the Germans and Belgian pro-Germans. The Government was not hoodwinked, neither was the King. When Germany's professions of friendship for the country, of affection for the Royal family was greatest, the Belgian Government and King realised the danger from Germany was most imminent. It was King Albert who was first fully undeceived as to Germany's intentions, and it was the German Emperor himself who undeceived him.

In a famous interview early in November, 1913, between the King of the Belgians and the German Emperor, at which General von Moltke, Chief of the German Staff, was present, reported at length by M. Cambon, French Ambassador in Berlin, to his Government, the German Emperor exposed his policy to King Albert, showing himself no champion of peace.

Monsieur J. Cambon's dispatch to M. Stephen Pichon, Minister for Foreign Affairs, dated November 22nd, 1913, ran :

"I have received from an absolutely sure source a record of a conversation which is reported between the Emperor and the King of the Belgians, in the presence of the Chief of the General Staff, General von Moltke, a fortnight ago—a conversation which would greatly appear to have struck King Albert. I am in no way surprised by the impression created, which corresponds with that made

on me some time ago. Hostility against us is becoming more marked, and the Emperor has ceased to be a partisan of peace. The German Emperor's interlocutor thought up to the present, as did everybody, that William the Second, whose personal influence has been exerted in many critical circumstances in favour of the maintenance of peace, was still in the same state of mind. This time, it appears, he found him completely changed. The German Emperor is no longer, in his eyes, the champion of peace, against the bellicose tendencies of certain German parties. William II. has been brought to think that war with France is inevitable, and that it will have to come to it one day or the other. The Emperor, it need hardly be said, believes in the crushing superiority of the German army, and in its assured success.

"General von Moltke spoke in exactly the same sense as his Sovereign. He also declared that war was necessary and inevitable, but he showed himself still more certain of success. 'For,' said he to the King, 'this time we must put an end to it' (*cette fois il faut en finir*), 'and your Majesty can hardly doubt the irresistible enthusiasm which on that day will carry away the whole German people.'

"The King of the Belgians protested that to interpret the intentions of the French Government in this manner was to travesty them, and to allow

oneself to be misled as to the feeling of the French nation by the manifestations of a few hotheads, or of conscienceless intriguers.

"The Emperor and his Chief of General Staff none the less persisted in their point of view.

"During this conversation the Emperor, moreover, appeared overwrought and irritable. As the years begin to weigh upon William II. the family traditions, the retrograde feelings of the Court, and, above all, the impatience of soldiers, are gaining more ascendancy over his mind. Perhaps he may feel I know not what kind of jealousy of the popularity acquired by his son, who flatters the passions of the Pan-Germans, and, perhaps, he may find that the position of the Empire in the world is not commensurate with its power. Perhaps, also, the reply of France to the last increase in the German Army, the object of which was to place Germanic superiority beyond question, may count for something in these bitternesses, for, whatever one may say, it is felt here, that the Germans cannot do much more. One may ask what lay behind the conversation. The Emperor and his Chief of General Staff may have intended to impress the King of the Belgians, and lead him not to resist in case a conflict with us should arise. Perhaps, also, there may be a desire to have Belgium less hostile towards certain ambitions displayed here with regard to the Belgian Congo. But this latter

hypothesis does not seem to me compatible with the intervention of General von Moltke.

"Further, the Emperor William is less master of his impatience than is generally believed. More than once I have seen him allow his innermost thoughts to escape. Whatever may have been the object of his conversation, which has been reported to me, the confidence has none the less the gravest character. It corresponds with the precariousness of the general situation, and with the state of a certain portion of opinion in France and Germany. If I were allowed to draw conclusions I would say that it would be wise to take into account the new fact that the Emperor is growing familiar with an order of ideas which formerly was repugnant to him, and that, to borrow from him a phrase he likes to use: 'We should keep our powder dry.'"

The German Emperor went farther in his insistence with King Albert than the wording of the diplomatist's dispatch shows. The conversation reported by M. Cambon was not the first or most important that took place between the German Emperor and the Belgian King regarding Belgian neutrality and the position of Belgium in the inevitable war.

Immense pressure was brought to bear upon King Albert to have him throw in his weight on the side of Germany. The pressure of personal friendship, of family relationship, of what was represented as

being the interest of Belgium. He withstood it all. When friendly pressure failed threats were attempted, none the less serious because they were covert; he treated them with disdain.

Firm as King Albert's attitude was, the German Emperor did not lose hope of winning him to his side, or coercing him to remain neutral. Even after the war had begun, Belgian towns laid low, Belgian peasants slain, the Belgian army forced back on Antwerp, and Brussels occupied by the Germans, a Belgian Minister of State was prevailed on by the German Governor of Brussels, Field-Marshal von der Goltz, to carry fresh German proposals to his Sovereign at Antwerp. This gentleman went, he declares unwillingly on what he knew to be a bootless errand. His reception was of the coldest. King Albert's answer to the German proposal was a curt and contemptuous refusal.

These proposals consisted of an offer on the part of the Germans to leave Antwerp unmolested if the Belgian army remained there within its defences without troubling the Germans, seeking to interfere with their occupation of the country, or impeding them on their line of march towards France.

CHAPTER XV

Storm-Clouds over Belgium

The neutrality of Belgium was a device of the Powers assembled at the Congress of London, hit on for their own security, without much thought of Belgium's welfare, and little consideration for the Belgians' preferences. It was Talleyrand who proposed it; the other Powers accepted it at England's suggestion mainly in order to prevent the French desire of obtaining possession of Belgium for which Talleyrand was secretly working, from being ever accomplished. King Leopold I. reminded Queen Victoria long afterwards in a letter. "This neutrality," he wrote on February 15th, 1856, "was in the real interest of this country, but our good Congress here *did not* wish it, and even opposed it. It was *imposé* on them. A neutrality to be respected must be *protected*."

Once their country was declared neutral, the Belgians were quick to see the advantages neutrality gave them. They welcomed it, and were determined to maintain it, as recent events most clearly show. If any blame might be attached to them, it would

be that of having placed too great a confidence on the guarantee of the Powers. For long they believed the promise to observe their neutrality, so freely and solemnly made, would be held to unswervingly. No one in Belgium dared to think that any of the Great Powers would break this engagement, but from outside, hints came long ago. Palmerston spoke solemn words of warning as to what men might do if they went to war. It was with difficulty the Belgian Kings and War Ministers prevailed on the country to vote the supplies necessary for the maintenance of the Army and other defences of the country, under the clause of the act of neutrality which bound Belgium to keep up a sufficient force to repel invasion, until the Powers who guaranteed her neutrality came to her assistance.

To the very last, all the Powers professed themselves determined to fulfil their engagements towards Belgium, but facts spoke strongly, and gradually the eyes of the Belgians were awakened to the danger which surrounded them. Not only did Germany on the one hand and France on the other mass great armies on the frontier, but each of these Powers made other military preparations which made it evident that when hostilities broke out they expected Belgium would once again become the theatre of war she had so often been in centuries gone by. France cannot be blamed for fortifying her threatened frontier, but the strong fortifications she drew up on the sides of

the Meuse and the Moselle made it almost certain that if Germany declared war on France she would inevitably violate Belgian neutrality by seeking to enter France through Belgium.

Long before war was declared, the French military authorities, summing up the situation, set forth the reasons which would tempt Germany to descend on Belgium in spite of any promise she might have given to that country. The first of these was the weakness of the Belgian defences, as compared with the strength of those in France. It would be to Germany's greatest interest, they said, to advance by a way in which she would not be blocked by the forts guarding the French frontier between Belfort and Sedan.

In 1892 Claude Messin said: "There is a German interest superior to German neutrality before which that neutrality must yield."

"Belgium traversed," said the French strategists, "the Germans will reach our frontier at a point where its defences are most feeble, both naturally and artificially. We have firmly closed the front door, but we have left open the side doors, and it is by them the enemy will enter."

The next reason the French strategists gave was that Germany, by taking possession of Belgium, could prevent the English Expeditionary Forces from landing in a Belgian port.

Next came the question of a geographical objective.

" It is no longer," they said, " a city or a water-line, or any particular spot of land that an army will seek, but the enemy whom they must search for, combat and crush."

Again, the superiority in numbers would tempt the Germans to rush forward with their great forces immediately on war being declared. For the advance of an army such as Germany would be sure to put into the field, wide plains were necessary. Such fields were not to be found in crowded Lorraine.

These strategists foresaw that the German advance would be made by the pass between the Sambre and the Meuse—no narrow gorge, but a wide expanse of 30 miles. The great extension of the German railway lines, built evidently for military purposes and converging towards the Belgian frontier, was an indication sufficient for them.

As long ago as 1884 the camp at Elsenborn had grown to be a menace to Belgium. Malmédy, a little town of German Limbourg, some kilomètres from the Belgian frontier, with a population of 4,000 souls, suddenly developed into a vast armed camp of 60,000 soldiers clearly massed so as to be ready for a descent on Belgium.

Belgium was for years overrun by German spies—in Brussels, Antwerp, La Panne, and on the Dutch frontier at Terneuze, as well as in the Walloon country at Liège, Charleroi and Chimay. There was at Brussels a Chief of the German Secret Service, who

was accomplished in sending flying agents to execute missions in France, by automobile and in other ways, and in recruiting spies. The recruitment of spies was carried on by means of advertisements in newspapers, offering easy work under certain conditions. Moreover, every German who entered Belgium was a spy. No Englishman or Frenchman who voyaged on pleasure would think of acting as a spy or of gaining profit by what he saw by chance. The Germans, on the other hand, show their mentality when they refuse to believe that any child of Alsace-Lorraine who asked permission to enter the country, to visit old familiar sights or even the graves of his parents, did so for an innocent purpose. Being spies themselves, they think all others spies. Every German who established factories in Belgium did so for the purpose of advancing the military outposts of the country. Belgium was filled with skilled Germans who worked at lesser wages than their abilities could command, and made themselves the best of friends with all the Belgians, amongst whom they mixed, simply so that when the time came they could furnish the fullest information to the army chiefs. The very governesses, even the nursemaids, who were employed in Belgium, it has since been discovered, acted as a regular organised corps of spies.

It was not only on the châteaux of German dukes living in Belgium that wireless telegraphic apparatus were placed. The pigeon-flying love of the Belgians

was largely utilised, and openly, by entering into competition. German carrier-pigeons were taught to fly from and to Belgium.

Much of this came to the ears of King Albert and his advisers.

In 1893 the Staff of the German Army constructed near the Baraque Michel, on the highest spot of Belgian territory, an observatory for the purpose of practising triangulation, and this, although permitted, was well known to the Belgian authorities. In like manner a German mission made a wireless telegraphic installation at La Panne.

Besides spies, the whole country was overrun by the agents of the German Military Survey Office and others, seeking information which is not found on maps.

In the Ardennes there were found Germans carrying on lowly occupations—colporteurs, pedlars and such-like—which allowed them to see and hear everything. These strange dealers sold next to nothing and spent money freely.

In 1912 the valleys of the Sambre and the Meuse were filled by batches of German officers who, maps in hand, studied the whole of the country. All this was carried on so openly that Belgium's neighbour, France, though assured by Belgium of her honesty and her rigid determination to maintain her neutrality, became more than half convinced that Belgium had a secret understanding with Germany, and was

prepared, in the event of war, to allow her neutrality to be violated by Germany with no more than a show of opposition, if with as much. Belgium's military weakness also alarmed France to such an extent that both she and England officially warned the Belgian Government of the danger in which it lay. They made no demand on Belgium, for Belgium is a free country on which coercion ought not to be exercised. Yet the information conveyed to the Belgian Cabinet was sufficient to compel it to induce the Belgian Parliament to authorise instant action.

After many choppings and changings in military matters, the Prime Minister, Baron de Broqueville, resolved on making a frank statement of the case to the Chambers, and on February 13th, 1913, at the opening of the sitting, he invited the House to go into secret committee and lay the whole matter before the House.

The story the Prime Minister had to tell was alarming. The old system under which the Belgian Army had been recruited had long since proved a failure. It had been changed in 1909, and the country was then provided with an army which was able, and would have proved sufficient, had not France and Germany made such immense advances in their effectives. This had been pointed out by Baron de Broqueville in his speech to the Chamber on November 12th, 1912, when he stated that the march of events made it incumbent for Belgium to lay new burdens

on herself. Belgium's confidence in the guarantees of her neutrality remained, he said, but it was impossible to lose sight of the fact that the grouping together of the Powers by alliances or *ententes* had created a situation which, in the case of European war, might make the guarantee of neutrality of little use. It is to be foreseen, in fact, said M. de Broqueville, foretelling what actually happened, that all the Powers guaranteeing our neutrality would become belligerent. In view of such an eventuality, he concluded, Belgium should pass a law putting herself into a state of military defence to the greatest possible extent in her power—in other words, a law of compulsory service.

CHAPTER XVI

The King and the Army

A lady once asked King Leopold I.: "Have you been a soldier?" "Madame," he replied, "I am, and have been for forty years, a Field-Marshal."

This story is true, though it seems a naïve question for anyone to ask of a king if he had borne arms, for every king, whether he wills it or not, is of necessity a soldier and a commander of men. The world, until this war broke out, may have thought King Albert of Belgium was more of a thinker, a student, and a philanthropist than a soldier. It may well have forgotten that the traditions of his family since history first recalls them have been those of warriors, and that his earliest and longest studies were made in a military school under the directions of great generals.

The war now being waged found neither Belgium nor its King unprepared for military defences. "The King understood that a rich nation occupying the perilous geographical situation of Belgium should

have a strong army, that school of energy and disinterestedness. In spite of the hesitations, and even of the systematic opposition which so many years of illusions accumulated, he succeeded, thanks to some energetic support, in creating a new national army which the war of 1914 has unfortunately surprised in the middle of its organisation," writes his Majesty's old schoolfellow and just admirer, who has the honour of holding a high place in his military service, and whose notes have been courteously placed at the author's disposal.

Belgium is so great an industrial country that people had forgotten that it was also, at all times, a country of soldiers. The strange legend of Belgian soldiers' timidity, or worse, at Waterloo, picked up most probably from boastful half-pay officers who after Waterloo tried to insist that all the glory of the campaign against Napoleon belonged to the English army, and repeated, unfortunately, by England's great novelist of the Victorian era, led Englishmen to believe that the Belgian army was a thing to be ignored. There never was a greater error. From the days of Cæsar, who had a tough battle to fight that day he overthrew the Nervii, to the days of William of Germany, the Belgian soldiers have been men to count with, whom to face lightly was to face foolhardily. Belgian neutrality never for one moment meant that the Belgian army was like the army of Monaco or of the Vatican, a mere Sovereign's body-

guard accoutred and attired for purposes of parade. When William I. of the Netherlands goaded his Belgian subjects into resistance he learned that Belgian men, whether they wore the uniform of the regular soldiery or the blouse of the volunteers, had the actual stuff of soldiers in them. They were descended from those men whose military ardour made Belgium, according to the historian Tilly, the best military school in Europe. There was not a gentleman who did not boast in that historian's time of having first borne arms there; not a captain who was not proud of having been instructed there. For centuries the Walloon infantry was famous on every battlefield of Europe. The ardent sons of Belgium have sought for glory in every field—the victories of peace alone never satisfied them. They rejoiced in the tranquillity of their Fatherland, which they themselves had won for it in the field of 1830, but when peace obtained at home, and the peaceful arts flourished there, the Belgian soldiers did not let their arms rust in their scabbards, nor did they consider it right that all a nation's sons should wield no more lethal weapons than pruning hooks.

A very few years after the creation of the Belgian Kingdom and the guarantee of Belgian neutrality, a Belgian detachment went forth to fight in Portugal for Doña Maria. In 1864 the Belgian soldiers were the last faithful few who rallied round the tottering throne in Mexico of the Emperor Maximilian, husband

of the Belgian Princess Charlotte. And still more recently, in our own days, Belgian soldiers contested eagerly with one another for the honour of sustaining their Sovereign's cause against the slave-hunting Arabs and their savage hordes in the Congo; and when the Boxer troubles arose in China in 1900 Belgian soldiers rushed eagerly to arms to form an expeditionary corps.

Therefore it was with no misplaced confidence that King Albert, seeing the storm-clouds gather, addressed himself to the Belgian Cabinet and the chiefs of the Belgian army, and called on them to aid him in placing the Belgian army on a basis which would enable his country to defend herself against any violator of pledges and sustain her cause, even though those who now violated any pledges were somewhat tardy in fulfilling their promises.

There were timid men high in the counsels of the Belgian nation who held that the country's *rôle* should be merely a passive one, that the Belgian nation would keep its every pledge and the Belgian army fulfil its *rôle* by remaining absolutely neutral; that Belgium was bound neither by honour nor necessity to attempt the impossible, that if an overwhelming Power advanced upon her it was her right to withdraw her forces to her last strong place at Antwerp, and there to keep the nation's flag flying until the Powers bound to aid her came to her assistance.

The King and the Army

These weak counsels might have prevailed had King Albert been less strong and less determined to fulfil his duty than he was. During the long years of peace in the reign of King Leopold II., the Belgian Government, not by the people's will, had allowed the army to dwindle in numbers until its strength was not sufficient to enable it to defend all its forts, much less to take the field against an enemy. As has been told,* the army, though nominally one of volunteers, was in reality one of paid substitutes, and there was a party not without influence in the State who did all in its power to discourage others than those who served for monetary gain from entering the army. It is fortunate that the warlike spirit still predominated in Belgium.

When the European situation became alarming the young men rallied to the King, and it was made unmistakably clear, even to the most peace-loving in the Parliament, that the nation would be satisfied with nothing but compulsory military service.

The way for the remodelling of the army had been cleared by the Army Bill of 1909, to which King Leopold II. gave his royal assent on his deathbed. That Bill substituted personal service for the service of substitutes, requiring each family to provide one son for army service. Under it the peace strength was left at the old figure of 42,800, but the *cadres*

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* *See* Chapter IV., p. 57.

of the army were changed, and a scheme evolved by which it was hoped that the war strength of the army would reach 210,000 men.

The alarms and excursions of 1911 and 1912 strengthened the hands of King Albert and his supporters, who sought for the immediate increase of the army. The Bill which was introduced in January, 1913, provided for general compulsory service, which, although many exemptions were provided for, would give a war strength of 340,000 men, composed of twelve classes. In introducing it, the Prime Minister, who is also Minister for War, informed the Chamber that it was calculated that normally, in a population of 7,000,000 inhabitants, there would be about 70,000 young men eligible for soldiers. Of this number, according to his plan, forty-nine per cent., or little less than half, were to be taken into the service, *i.e.*, 33,000 men, to whom might be added 2,000 volunteers, or 35,000 men—double of what was then the actual contingent of the army. This, on the basis of twelve classes being under the colours, would give an army of 340,000 men—150,000 for a field army, 130,000 for fortresses, and 60,000 for reserve. The Bill did not become law soon enough to permit of more than two of the new classes being called up on the outbreak of war, so the actual army reserves of Belgium at the moment that war broke out amounted to no more than 260,000 men.

The forts of Antwerp, Namur and Liège required no less than 130,000 men to defend them. If the soldiers in the active army were used for the defence of these strong places, only 133,000 could have been put into the field, but the army commanders resolved to put into the field every trained soldier of the regular army, and leave the defence of the strong places to the Garde Civique, the citizen soldiery, who had some training and were eager to serve.

Another duty which it was decided to assign to the Garde Civique was that of guarding the bridges, railway lines, and other important points within the country, acting as scouts, and generally keeping the roads of communication open for the general army.

The Garde Civique are citizen soldiers, drilled twelve times a year, and called out to line the streets and take a decorative part in the proceedings on festive occasions in the great cities. They are drawn from the middle and lower classes, professional men and shopkeepers for the most part. Theoretically every man apt for service who was not in the regular army or reserve belonged to this body, but, excepting in the town, it existed for the most part only on paper, and everywhere those in servile employment were excluded from its ranks. It resembled the English Volunteers in many ways. There was truth in the saying of one of its members on a memorable occasion in the reign of Queen Victoria, when the Volunteer movement was in its ardent youth, and the Belgian

Garde Civique came to England to return a visit the Volunteers paid to Belgium. At a banquet given in their honour the worthy Belgian citizen soldier explained amidst immense applause to his English hosts that the Belgian Garde Civique was an organisation exactly the same as theirs—Volunteers, only service in their ranks was compulsory.

It was a consequence of the Law of 1913 which made service in the regular army obligatory on all citizens, that the Garde Civique was destined to disappear, but during the transitory period its members were determined they would do their duty to the full. Strict discipline replaced previous laxity, and all in the ranks of this branch were keen on active service. They welcomed the chance which sent them to the front and the fortresses, and performed well their duty on the lines of communication. Knowing something of military discipline, and filled with ardour, the Garde Civique, which numbered close on 100,000 men, was not to be despised, especially when its members were distributed amongst the regular forces who encouraged and sustained them. The Germans did not make the mistake of despising them, but sought to drive them from the field by declaring they would treat them as irregulars, and as such shoot them wherever they caught them, denying them the rights of belligerents. When this was known to the Belgian generals, retiring on Antwerp, discouraged by the tardiness in the arrival

of their allies, they disbanded the Garde Civique, to the indignation of the men who served in it, and who at Brussels, where the city had been left wholly in their charge, at Alost, at Ghent, and everywhere else throughout the country, were loud in the expression of their anger at being deprived by their own Government of the arms they had taken up for their country's defence. So great was their indignation that the Belgian commanders resolved to allow them to risk the Germans' vengeance sooner than baulk them in their desire to serve their King and country, and they were again called to the colours, with which they did service as good as the best.

The ardour to serve their King and country in the field was not confined to men of any age to join the colours. Every boy in Belgium was fired by it. There were no more brave or useful corps in the Belgian army than those of the Boy Scouts. At headquarters, with regiments on the march, and at the front under fire, the Boy Scouts did excellent work, for which they have received well-merited praise and rewards. At Furnes, before the whole army, King Albert pinned the Cross of the Order of Leopold on the blouse of Joseph Lievin, a Boy Scout, created a Chevalier of the highest order in Belgium for his brave action under fire at Liège.

Men have wondered at the bravery and achievements of the little Belgian army in the face of what

seemed overwhelming odds. The secret of its bravery lay, in part, in the great traditions it inherited, in still a greater part in its loyalty to its King, whose whole-hearted love for his country and his people made every man and boy in Belgium resolute in the determination to leave no nerve unstrained, no effort unmade to sustain his cause and uphold his throne.

CHAPTER XVII

The Declaration of War

In the last week of July the Belgian army was mobilised. On August 4th, the Chambers, summoned hastily, met in Brussels. The streets of the Belgian capital never wore a more animated or a more bright appearance than that day. Flags—those of Belgium's allies, English and French, with the American flag, and those of a dozen other friendly or neutral countries, and, above all, the national tricolour of Belgium —red, yellow and black—floated everywhere in the sunshine. Motors rushed through the streets at a pace that suggested errands of life or death; boy scouts darted everywhere. The absence of the regular soldiers was not noticeable, for their place was filled by the Garde Civique, in whose uniform and deportment the casual observer noticed nothing different from that of the regulars. In the crowds that filled the streets, all were eager, but none were downcast. From the Palace to the Parliament House the royal processions passed through dense mobs of cheering people. The Queen, the Royal children,

above all, the King, were acclaimed with cries that rent the heavens. There were no longer in Belgium Socialists to hoot or anarchists to glower; with the distant rumbling of the German cannons, all Belgians had discovered they revered the Queen and were proudly loyal to the King.

Within the stately palace of the nation all was solemn and impressive, as befitted the place in which Parliament was assembled to perform the heroic deed of flinging back defiance at a mighty foe, and performing an action on which the future of the whole nation depended. The King, attired as always when he addresses Parliament, in the full-dress uniform of a Belgian general,* was escorted with accustomed state to the throne. Having first seated himself on it, he rose and addressed the representatives of his people:

"Never, since 1830, has a more grave hour sounded for Belgium. The strength of our right and the need of Europe for our autonomous existence

* It has been stated in English publications that the King wore the uniform in which he was about to take the field, and that a great number of the legislators he addressed wore campaign uniforms. None of this is true, and as improbable as would be a statement that King George, supposing his Majesty intended personally to join in the campaign, went first in State to the English Parliament wearing a khaki uniform. The Belgian King, Senators and Deputies were met to perform solemnly a great duty, not to make idle theatrical display. The scene which I witnessed was as I describe it.

make us still hope the dreaded events will not occur. If, however, it is necessary for us to resist an invasion of our soil, that duty will find us armed and ready to make the greatest sacrifices. Our young men have already come forward to defend the threatened fatherland.

"One duty alone is imposed upon us, namely, the maintenance of a stubborn resistance, courage, and union. Our bravery is proved by our faultless mobilisation and by the multitude of voluntary engagements. This is the moment for action. I have called you together to-day in order to allow the Chambers to participate in the enthusiasm of the country. You will know how to adopt with urgency all necessary measures. Are you decided to maintain inviolate the sacred patrimony of our ancestors ?

"No one will fail in his duty, and the Army is capable of performing its task. The Government and I are fully confident. The Government is aware of its responsibilities and will carry them out to the end to guard the supreme welfare of the country. If a stranger should violate our territory he will find all the Belgians gathered round their Sovereign, who will never betray his constitutional oath. I have faith in our destinies. A country which defends itself wins the respect of all, and cannot perish.

"God will be with us."

This speech was a noble utterance made most royally, an appeal straight from the great heart of the bravest man who has drawn his sword in this war to the great hearts of the brave people he rules over and leads. There was not one in the crowded Chamber, on its floor or in its galleries, who was unprepared for the announcement it contained. Belgium is a tiny country all over which, in the course of a summer's day, in time of peace, a man could travel from north to south and east to west, to its Dutch, German, Luxembourg, and French frontiers, and to the sea which bounds it towards England. There was no spot in the country so distant as not to be threatened by the war preparations of its bellicose neighbour, no hamlet so secluded that its inhabitants were without knowledge of the movements of the great Powers and of the importance to Belgium of their negotiations. For years previously every newspaper in Belgium had been full of the coming war. The question of the military defences of the country, their necessity, and their adequacy, had been discussed in several heated debates in the Chamber. Military authorities and newspaper seers alike had long taught the people that when the inevitable happened, and peace between Germany and France was ruptured, invasion of Belgium was certain. The French and German frontiers were so strongly fortified where they touched each other, it was clear to the meanest tactician that whichever

army moved first would seek to advance through Belgium. A French invasion was possible, but it was a German invasion men expected and feared. None, therefore, were surprised to learn that war had broken out and that Germany had violated Belgian neutrality.

Although there was no fear, there was some unquiet in the assembly which the King addressed. Each man was certain of himself; no man as yet was absolutely certain of his neighbour. For generations Belgium had been rent by party feuds. It was not many months since the general strike had led men to fear bloodshed and civil war in the land. At the very moment Parliament assembled the racial jealousies of the two races which make up the Belgian people had led to the formation of Walloon and Flemish parties whose parliamentary leaders breathed undying hatred of each other, and demanded autonomy for their separate halves of the country as the only alternative to separation. How would those of the other parties act? the members of each clique asked each other, not without apprehension. The ringing cheers which marked each period of the King's appeal, the enthusiastic outburst at its end, answered all such questions. In 1914, as in 1830, the union of the Belgian people to maintain their nation's liberty was proved to themselves and proclaimed to the world. Walloons, who a month before had publicly accused the Flamingants of being treacherous pro-

Germans, Flemings who had declared the Walloons were ready to fling open their gates to the invader, and smooth his passage through their valleys, grasped hands on the floor of the Chamber and in the galleries, and swore to conquer or die, side by side, in defence of their King and country. None cheered the King more heartily or showed himself more in accord with Catholics and millionaire Liberals than the Socialist chief, who had declared royalty to be nothing but the weathercock on the top of the edifice built by religion and capital, which Socialism had already shaken and would soon level with the ground.

The enthusiasm reached its height when, the King having left, the Prime Minister mounted the tribune and announced that the leaders of the Liberal party in the Senate and Chamber, having been summoned to the Privy Council as Ministers of State on the previous day, Emile Vandervelde, leader of the Socialists, was now, likewise, summoned to the Council with the same title. Clearly all parties and all classes were united. "It is worth invasion, it is worth war, to have this union," cried a man in one of the galleries, and all who heard him joined their cheers to his.

The statement regarding war made by M. de Broqueville was of the gravest. At seven o'clock on the evening of Sunday, August 2nd, Germany had presented an ultimatum to Belgium, calling on

Belgium to allow the German troops to use her territories as a basis for an attack on France in return for a German pledge to respect her independence, and threatening Belgium with her enmity if her demand was rejected. Belgium had replied she would maintain her neutrality, and Germany, acting on her menace, had already invaded the country, nothing remains but to arm and fight.

Unanimously the Chamber approved of every proposal the Government made and voted all the money it called for. The enthusiasm within the Parliament House was mirrored outside. From the balcony the Prime Minister harangued an immense crowd, tingling with excitement and eagerness for the fray. The doors of the recruiting offices were besieged. At every barracks thousands of volunteers were enlisted in the army every hour and before long the demand was so great it was found necessary to ask would-be soldiers to postpone their applications, every inch of room and shred of equipment the army possessed being exhausted by the multitude of first-comers. The people hoped that, whatever happened, Brussels, being an open city, would be spared from German occupation, and by common accord the whole city was turned into a vast hospital for the wounded. The red cross appeared everywhere ; there was hardly a shopkeeper who did not place his premises at the disposal of the central committee to be used as a ward. There was not a private house-

holder whose home was not turned into a branch of the great nursing association, whose womenkind did not pass their time in preparing bandages and making clothes for the wounded.

CHAPTER XVIII

The King at the Front

King Albert went speedily to the front with his army, which had been mobilised in nineteen hours. Its magnificent defence at Liège, its gallant actions at Namur are known to all the world. As yet unsupported by any of his allies, the King was obliged to fall back before superior numbers, and withdraw his army to Antwerp. The Belgians did not cede easily—in their retreat they fought every inch of the way. The retreat, notwithstanding the conscious bravery of those who made it, was heart-rending. They retired on a tranquil and smiling land, rich in the promise of harvest and the products of long peace. As they went backwards they saw the land behind them made desolate and bare by the ravages of war. They saw the harvest trampled under foot, houses destroyed, spires toppled to the ground, altars overturned. Fearful tales of atrocities committed by the Germans on defenceless peasants and townsfolk reached their ears. Not all of these tales were true; but there

was truth enough in them to sadden the King's heart, to fill him and his army with indignation, which nothing but his stern command of himself prevented from growing into frenzied rage.

The last stand before Antwerp was made about Louvain. On August 14th a momentary junction was made at Charleroi between the French and Belgian armies, but no sufficient number of French soldiers or guns had been brought up, and before the Allies could make their position sufficiently strong the Germans, advancing in great numbers, cut them off from the Belgians. King Albert was obliged to retreat on Louvain in the night of August 17th. The next day the University city was full of Belgian soldiers. It had already been for some days the headquarters of the cavalry division. With the soldiers there mixed a great multitude of civilians, come from all parts to visit or seek for news of relatives serving with the colours. The air was thick with the dust raised by the wheels of motors, which passed and re-passed through the town in unending streams. The cafés were besieged by thousands of customers; in the restaurants, still famous for their good cheer, friendly battles for seats took place between men joyously hungry. Although the army was retreating, none had lost heart. Not one in the doomed city dreamt of the fate which hung over it and its inhabitants.

A desire to avoid drawing the enemy's fire on its

ancient churches, its magnificent town hall, and its venerated University, led the King to decide upon the evacuation of Louvain, and he withdrew his troops from the city, and allowed the Germans to enter it without opposition. For a like cause the Belgian Government withdrew from Brussels to Antwerp on the same day, and the Garde Civique, who had dug trenches around the city, and were prepared to sell their lives in defending their capital, were called in and disbanded. The King, at the head of his army, retired within the fortifications of Antwerp, where he rejoined the Queen and their children, who, coming from Brussels, had taken up their residence at the palace in the Place de Meir.

King Albert's heart was sore when he found himself forced to withdraw to Antwerp. He was not discouraged, but he felt his brave army had not been seconded in the manner it should have been. He thought the Allies who praised the Belgians so much for their stubborn resistance to the Germans, should have come more speedily and in greater numbers to their aid. The losses of his army had been immense. For a moment he swore he would not again risk it unsupported in the field, and sat down in Antwerp with folded arms to await the coming of the Allies in sufficient number.

For a moment only, and that a brief one. King Albert is a soldier who could not restrain himself when any chance offered itself of striking a blow,

a king who could not see his people suffer without coming with whatever force he could to their aid. Once more he sallied forth from Antwerp with his army. He had inspired his generals and soldiers, exhausted by hard labour, and weakened by losses though they were, with so much of his own zeal that they swept the foe before them, all but re-took Brussels, all but changed the tide of war. Had one or other of the Allies supported the Belgian army at that moment with anything of force, historians might now be writing the history of a war already ended gloriously for those whom Germany still seeks to crush. The Belgians re-took Alost, re-occupied Malines, and held strong positions about Cortenberg between Brussels and Louvain. For a week the cannonading was heard continuously night and day in Brussels. During that week of heavy fighting King Albert was everywhere in the Belgian lines; now by the roadside consulting with his generals, now in the trenches with a rifle borrowed from a soldier firing himself on the foe, again at the front encouraging and directing. So hot was his assault that every available German soldier was drawn out to resist him. There were times when there were not more than five hundred German soldiers, all told, in Brussels. So heavy were the blows he struck that again and again the Germans broke and fled before him, and we in Brussels saw lines of stragglers pass along, shoving up the streets before them

cannons their drooping horses were too weak to pull.

In those days the Germans in Brussels held their lives in their hands, and they knew it. Aides-de-camp racing to and fro in motors from the General's headquarters in Brussels at the Ministry of Science and Art, to the front, had soldiers seated by their sides, and lying on the back of the cars, with their hands on the triggers of their rifles, ready to fire on the first occasion. At this moment the citizens of every class showed their good sense. The temptation to rise against the handful of Germans who still lorded it over them, arrogantly if not brutally, was very great. Asked why he held his hand, the leader of the Belgian anarchists replied he did so so that the Germans might have no excuse, if they came back in greater numbers, of destroying the ancient buildings by way of reprisal. Our spy system, he said, is quite as complete as that of the Germans. We know exactly how many German soldiers there are in the city. It would be the easiest thing for us to seize them all without bloodshed; but we know also they have undermined the Grand Place and the Hôtel de Ville, and we do not wish to place the ancient buildings of the city in greater danger. Still no sufficient reinforcements came to King Albert, and he was obliged to desist in his attack on the Germans, and withdraw his troops once more to Antwerp. The sortie had won him more than he lost. The

German losses were very heavy—from between 40,000 to 50,000 men killed and wounded. The losses of the Belgians were much less.

In Antwerp, both before and during the siege, the time of the King and Queen was occupied more in preparing soldiers and civilians to be ready to face whatever the future might bring, rather than encouraging them to bear the reverses of the moment, for, strangely enough, few in Antwerp realised the gravity of the situation. Writing from Antwerp in August, the French journalist, Alfred de Gobart, said :

> "Is this town Belgian ? Do they know here the misfortunes of Aerschot ? Is this town *en fête* even on the map of Europe, of Europe torn by violent bloodshed, or does its formidable line of forts isolate it from the world ? It is impossible to believe that Antwerp knows that we are at war. It is inadmissible that a Belgian town whose occupants must have sons, brothers and other relatives fighting the enemy, should preserve the allures of a rich and joyous town where good living is the law. Out yonder they are fighting ; here, outside all the cafés there are seated gay-gowned, laughing-eyed women, and men who drink and smoke, and gaily discuss the news printed in papers whose headlines cry victories ; shops are open and brilliantly lit, crowds encumber the footpaths and promenade through the town. Officers of the

Garde Civique parade on horseback, and when a wandering ambulance of the Red Cross passes, a crowd gathers to stare at the curiosity, come from some place else far away. Antwerp knows nothing of the war, and it is to be hoped she will know nothing of it. So much levity, so little sympathy, would little know how to support a great sorrow. The Queen was right the other night when she had the windows of her palace closely shuttered. The King acted well when, entering in a motor taken by chance, he lowered its blinds to prevent misplaced manifestations."

King Albert sternly suppressed any attempts made by his officers at this time to share in the distractions of the great city, even going to the length of breaking officers whose exuberance at a dinner he considered over great.

It is probable the levity some of the Antwerp citizens were blamed for at the commencement of the siege existed only on the surface. It is certain that when the moment of trial came none showed themselves wanting in self-denial or patriotism.

From Antwerp, King Albert led his army to France, where he is carrying on the fight with the same undaunted bravery as he displayed upon the Belgian plains. With him, after six months of the fiercest warfare there are actually fighting at the front 120,000 undaunted Belgian soldiers, and every day, travelling by way of England fresh Belgian

recruits flock to the colours, rallying round their King.

Whatever hap may fall him, however flows the tide of war, future generations cannot forget King Albert's actions in peace and war, and nothing can deprive him of the title of ALBERT THE BRAVE.

The subjects of the Belgian King will fight to the last man, so will their eager English allies and those of France. All are resolved that he shall have, as he deserves, the further title of ALBERT THE VICTORIOUS.

May God defend the Right.

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